



ALMOST  
A HERO



EASTERN PUBLIC SCHOOL,  
BROUGHTY FERRY.

Session 1907-1908.

 PRIZE 

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ALMOST A HERO.









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*Page 147.*



# ALMOST A HERO;

OR,

SCHOOL-DAYS AT ASHCOMBE.

BY

ROBERT RICHARDSON,

AUTHOR OF "THE YOUNG CRAGSMAN," "THE BOYS OF WILLOUGHBY,"  
ETC., ETC.

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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London:

T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW.

EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

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1901



## Contents.



I. FROM THE GREEN ISLE,	..	...	...	...	7
II. KAVANAGH'S HOME, ...	...	...	...	...	23
III. HARD TO STAND, ...	...	...	...	...	40
IV. A WIDENING BREACH,	...	...	..	...	58
V. A FAINT HEART, ...	...	...	...	...	77
VI. A SHABBY COAT, ...	...	...	...	...	97
VII. AN ADVENTUROUS QUARTETTE,	...	...	...	...	107
VIII. UNRAVELLED, ...	...	...	...	...	132
IX. MISS PENDRILL, ...	...	...	...	...	160
X. MISS PENDRILL LOQUITUR,	...	...	...	...	170
XI. MAKING AMENDS, ...	...	...	...	...	193
XII. THE DEAN'S SPEECH, ...	...	...	...	...	212



# ALMOST A HERO.

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## CHAPTER I

### FROM THE GREEN ISLE.

"He hath a trick of speech that's new to us,  
And all his ways are strange."



THE fourth form at Ashcombe House were in their places for the first morning lesson, and awaiting Dr. Marsh. Some few boys had their heads bent over their books, others were chatting confidentially together in twos and threes, and others playing tricks, teasing and chaffing one another.

A sudden lull in the talk, a cessation of the laughter and badinage, and the master entered the



room. He was accompanied by a boy, upon whom all eyes were immediately focussed ; for he was a stranger.

At Dr. Marsh's bidding the new-comer took his place at the foot of the class, and the master seated himself in his chair at his table. He was a man slightly below the middle height, of an active figure, with an alert, shrewd face, and dark whiskers and beard threaded with gray.

He opened a thin flat book lying on the table before him—the roll-book.

“What is your Christian name, Kavanagh?”

“Dennis, sir.”

Dr. Marsh wrote the name at the foot of the page appropriated to the fourth form.

“Dennis—Kavanagh,” whispered Sam Demerrick to his neighbour, pronouncing the name slowly and measuredly—“Irish, or I’m a Dutchman—name’s as Paddy as Rory O’Flynn, sure.”

Yes, Dennis Kavanagh was by birth Irish ; and the present is a suitable enough time to give

my reader, briefly, an idea of his personal look, as he is to play a foremost part in our little drama.

I think you would have called him a decidedly good-looking boy on the whole, though his face was somewhat too long for exact proportion, and owed nothing to colour. He had fine expressive eyes. It was in most respects a grave face for a boy, but the mouth was mobile and flexible—one that would be readily enough moved to laughter, and with humour in it. He was tall for his age, a figure rather spare, and wiry.

The lesson began and continued. It was a Latin one, and the form was at present engaged on the first book of the Odes of Horace. This morning's lesson consisted of the first half of the ninth ode. By the time the hour was nearly ended, all the boys had construed in turn with the exception of the new-comer.

"Have you read any Horace, Kavanagh?" asked Dr. Marsh.

"Yes, sir."

"Ever done this ode before?"

"No, sir."

"Ah, then, we can't expect you to make much of it. But you have heard it gone through twice; you may as well try a few lines."

Dennis began to construe; and now that he spoke at length, instead of in brief monosyllabic replies, which was all that Dr. Marsh's few questions to him had called for, it became evident that his speech was marked by a decided Irish accent or brogue.

Moreover, he pronounced the Latin in the manner taught at all Irish and Scotch schools, with the vowels sounded broad and full—a style quite new to the English boys. It now struck them as something highly comical, and the brogue of Kavanagh's English speech was sufficient in itself to excite their sense of the humoursome.

A titter passed round the class, suppressed by each with more or less effect; significant glances were

interchanged ; neighbour nudged neighbour ; and a smile flickered on more than one face.

“ *Veedays oot awltay state neevay cahndeedum Soractay*,” whispered Sam Demerrick to the boy below him, giving an exaggerated and ludicrous imitation of Kavanagh’s manner of pronouncing the text, which I have thus tried to reproduce.

“ Och ! be me faith, but it’s the rale Tipperary smack he has intirely,” continued Sam.

The boys all put down Kavanagh’s pronunciation of the Latin mainly to his brogue ; for they had no thought of Latin being read in any other way than that to which they had been accustomed. The new-comer had read on only a few moments before the furtive mirth of the class attracted Dr. Marsh’s attention. He saw at once the cause of it, and his action was prompt.

“ Your pronunciation of the Latin strikes these young wiseacres as something extremely comical, Kavanagh. But let me tell them that you are in the right. There can be no doubt that the way

you have been taught is more correct than that which we follow in England. But I suspect you will have to learn our way in a little, faulty as it is, so that we may all understand each other."

Dr. Marsh spoke in a light good-humoured tone, with a smile on his face. He knew well enough that it was not only Kavanagh's pronunciation of the Latin, but his speech generally, that was stirring that part of their composition that is generally so easily reached in boys—their risible faculties. But he chose to ignore this, and to pretend that he himself thought that it was simply Kavanagh's manner of reading the Latin that was amusing his new class-mates from its novelty. He thought that in this way he would relieve Kavanagh from the embarrassment which he saw was coming over him, while at the same time it gave him an opportunity of administering a slight rebuke and check to the class.

Kavanagh was in truth feeling some embarrassment and discomfort; for the only half-concealed merriment of the class did not escape him, and he



partly guessed its cause. Dr. Marsh's words relieved him considerably.

When the master had ceased speaking, the class became pretty subdued. They felt that he had administered a mild snub to them; and they were, moreover, a little surprised and impressed at hearing that the stranger's method of reading Latin, peculiar and droll as it sounded to them, was the correct one. A silence fell upon the class, and Kavanagh proceeded quietly with his construing to the end of the verse, when the school bell rang—the signal that the first lesson of the morning was over. The boys rose from their places and filed out of the room.

That afternoon four boys were seated talking together in the school ground. The school had just been dismissed. The boys were Harry Wright the captain, Sam Demerrick, Willy Hood, and Arnold Maurice.

"I think it's a pity he's only a day-scholar, do you know," said Sam Demerrick. "We might have got some fun out of him if he'd been a boarder."

"I don't know. I think you would have soon tired of it, Sam. He seems such a quiet sober-sides, that you wouldn't have got much out of him, fun or anything else."

"Perhaps. But what a *swate* bit av a brogue he has to be sure. He must have come dirict from Tipperary, or Limerick, or Ballyshandrannon, or some such place, yesterday, or the day before that."

Sam was speaking with as close an imitation of Kavanagh's accent as he could manage, but greatly exaggerating it.

Sam was a boy inclined to stoutness. He had a round face, light hair, and twinkling eyes. The expression was one mainly of careless good temper; and Sam's whole figure, as he lay stretched at full length upon the grass, was suggestive of an easy, indolent nature.

The face was one that broke readily into laughter, and the mouth, when its possessor smiled, showed a fine row of white teeth. Sam's dress was careless, worn in a loose fashion, and with many folds and

creases in it, as though the tailor had received orders to make it a few sizes too large to allow for rapid growth.

“O Sam! you exaggerate Kavanagh’s way of talking. It isn’t as bad as that.”

The speaker was Willy Hood. Willy presented a marked contrast to Sam Demerrick. While the latter was formed on large lines, Willy was somewhat small for his years, which were equal to those of Sam’s.

He had a sober but pleasant face, with small features. His figure was neat and small, but active enough looking, a strong contrast again to Demerrick’s loose, sprawling, and somewhat flabby figure.

“Exaggerate do I, young Hood? Well, don’t you know that all imitation exaggerates more or less? Now some fellow has said—Shakespeare, or Milton, or Dr. Johnson, or Poor Richard, who was always saying things—that imitation is the sincerest kind of flattery. Much more, therefore, as Euclid would put it, is exaggeration the sincerest form of flattery.

Therefore, I have only been flattering Kavanagh Q.E.D."

Willy and the other two boys laughed, and Demerrick continued,—

"But, of course, you're ready to champion this new fellow, Will. Well, you're a good little youngster; I've always said that—haven't I?—and your respectable relations have a capital notion of packing a hamper. I've always maintained that too."

"And shown your appreciation of the fact more than once in a more practical way than by words, Sam," said Harry Wright.

"Correct as your own nice name, Harry. Practice upon a hamper shows better one's appreciation of it than mere praise, as you remark."

"I wish you wouldn't so often speak of me as if I were so much younger than yourself, Sam. I believe I am within a month of your own age," said Willy Hood, going back to Sam's first speech.

"So I have heard you say, but you wouldn't think it; would you?"

"Not judging by size, perhaps."

"I see your insinuation : you mean that you are quite my equal in knowledge and general eddication, and you think that's the proper test, eh ? 'The mind's the stature of the man' (or boy), says Dr. Watts. Well, I won't deny it. I'm not proud of my intellects. But is the amiable Willy Hood much hurt at my fatherly manner of addressing him ?"

"Not very much, Sam," answered Willy, smiling. "But it's like your coolness always to speak to a fellow like a pater."

"To go back to that Kavanagh again," said Arnold Maurice. "I wonder if he plays cricket, and if there's any chance of his being good enough for the first eleven ?"

The speaker was a tall youth, with a slim figure, a long, sallow-brown face, and dark eyes. You could not help noticing that he was very well dressed, and the careful and exact arrangement of his collar and scarf at once caught the eye.

His black, rather thin hair was brushed very



smooth over his temples, and there was a faint dark line on his upper lip. From the breast-pocket of his sack coat peeped out a snowy corner of handkerchief, just an inch, neither more nor less. The faultlessness of Arnold Maurice's outward man, or rather outward boy, was an object of unfeigned admiration to some of his school-fellows, and of unconcealed fun to others.

There was something of an East Indian look about Arnold; and this idea was probably in Sam Demerrick's mind when he nicknamed his school-mate the "Nabob," a name which had at once struck the boys as happy.

Arnold was secretary of the cricket club at Ashcombe House. In most schoolboy sports he did not excel, nor had any wish to. But cricket he understood and played well, at least as far as batting went.

"I suppose they play cricket in Ireland," said Harry Wright in answer to Arnold's remark. "But Kavanagh doesn't look very promising somehow for

cricket, or any other game, indeed; he's such a grave-looking customer."

"That isn't always a test, though," said Sam Demerrick. "Take the Nabob here, for example. I'll back him to look as solemn, when he tries, as any judge in England, and yet he handles a bat not amiss.—But how many have we lost from the first eleven this half, Arnold; four, isn't it?"

"Yes; Ned Harvey, Jack Norris, Joe Darcy, and Alick King."

"Good fellows every one. What's become of them all—or at least three of them? I know about Jack Norris."

"Ned's gone into a life insurance office in London," said Willy.

"And Joe's coaching with a tutor before going to Edinburgh to study medicine," said Harry.

"And Alick's going out to Australia next month to an uncle who's got sheep-stations there," said Arnold.

"Lucky beggar; he's sure to get rich at that

game if he's got an uncle to back him up," said Sam.

"Well, we'll miss them all in other ways, besides for the cricket eleven. The place will feel quite lonely for a time. It makes one feel regularly sentimental thinking of the old chaps, and the fun we've had here together.

Ah me ! my heart is heavy, sad, and sore,  
A-thinking of the days that are no more ;  
For now, where once, alas ! we were eleven,  
Like Wordsworth's little girl we're only seven.

Poetry's the right thing when one feels sentimental ; isn't it, Harry ? But I'm particularly sorry that Jack Norris has gone, partly for selfish reasons, I'm afraid ; he was always so good-natured in giving one a lift in a bit of translation or Latin composition. And his kindness to me continued to the last, for in the holidays he gave me the whole of his first book of Horace's Odes translated, written out fair in a copy-book. He had been here longer than any fellow, you know, when he left, and had done this

book with Mergo before, and written out the translation."

"It was very good of him, certainly; but it will make you take things easier than ever, Sam," said Harry.

"Do you think so, captain? Well, do you know I'm not so sure of that myself. Now that I have got this translation to help me, I may not unlikely give the amount of time and pains that will be necessary to get up each lesson; whereas, if I had to worry through the Latin without any such aid, I should more often than not feel inclined to shirk it altogether, I'm afraid."

"Well, I hope it will have the effect you describe, Sam."

"Thanks for good wishes. Yes, I contemplate my Latin work this half with a much calmer mind than I have ever done before, that I can remember; for which I feel truly grateful to old Jack, and wish him all success in his chosen career. He's preparing for Oxford, you know;

and after he gets his degree, he's going to be a barrister.

I'll keep thy memory green, Jack Norris,  
For helping me to floor old Horace.  
'Henceforth begone! dull care, begone!'  
Were the last words of Marmion."

"How do the club funds stand, chancellor of the exchequer?"

"Decidedly low, as they always do at the beginning of a quarter," said Arnold. "I am calling in subscriptions as fast as I can. We want a lot of new things."

"You had better worry mine out of me pretty soon then," said Sam; "for I'm apt to get stumped out in regard to cash, quicker than most fellows, as I think you are aware. But I hear some of the fellows at cricket over there. Let's join them."

And the four boys rose and strolled in the direction of the cricket ground.



## CHAPTER II.

### KAVANAGH'S HOME.

"And so the little household fared,  
Knit by strong love together;  
Each other's joys and sorrows shared  
In bright or cloudy weather."



BENNET STREET, as those who are acquainted with Porthaven know, is in a decent but not the fashionable quarter of the town. A quiet back street, with terraces of respectable-looking but very small houses, with a monotony about them that is slightly depressing.

Into the interior of one of these I would introduce the reader. The room is much more cheerful and bright than the outward aspect of the house and its neighbours might lead you to hope for. Not that the furniture is either very ample or fine.

It is the reverse ; no more than sufficient in quantity, and of quite homely kind.

But there is an air of neatness and even taste in the arrangement of the room, which gives it its bright and homelike look. Still a close scrutiny of the apartment suggests the impression that to the inmates of the house the question of ways and means is one of thought and contrivance.

The carpet is faded and worn, the hearth-rug shows traces of the darning-needle not to be concealed, the window curtains have well-nigh lost whatever distinctive colour they received from the dyer's hands, the worsted crochet-work antimacassors thrown over the arm-chair and the back of the sofa conceal pathetic signs of old age and usage. It takes all the skill of the inmates of this room to counteract those opposing forces of wear and decay, which have a tendency to move onward with a dumb but unswerving progress.

There are two persons in the room now—women—mother and daughter. The younger is reclined

on the sofa, which has been drawn forward near the window.

You at once perceive, from the thin pale face and other unmistakable signs, that she is an invalid. But the face is, nevertheless, both a pretty and a very agreeable one; and when it flushes for a moment, as it sometimes does, one can readily imagine that in good health Annie Kavanagh would be more than pretty.

Mrs. Kavanagh is seated on a chair between the sofa and the window, which is open; for the day is a mild spring one, unusually warm for the season. She has some sewing in her hands.

Mrs. Kavanagh is taller and of a larger frame altogether than her daughter. The lines of the face are firmer and more marked. The face is not so feminine and pretty, and could never have been, though its expression is quite womanly too, and has more of character and cleverness. There are rather more lines in it than Mrs. Kavanagh's age quite justifies, for she is still in the prime of life; but

these disappear when she smiles, which, consequently, is the best time to estimate her years—turned forty.

It is the afternoon, a windless May afternoon. The sunshine lies still and warm upon the narrow quiet street, and gilds its somewhat sombre and monotonous tones with spring glory. A balmy air steals in at the window, which has in its breath a faint flavour and odour of the sea, which, though unseen, is not very far distant.

“It really feels this afternoon as if we were going to have summer very soon now, Annie,” said Mrs. Kavanagh. “Perhaps we are going to get it early this year, and yet it is well-nigh due now, so far south as we are here. This is considered one of the mildest parts of England. I hope for your sake we may have a long and bright summer.”

“Well, to-day is a good beginning, mamma; and I believe it *is* a beginning. I certainly do like the warm weather best, and feel better in it.”

“That is just because you get more sunshine and

fresh air then, the best medicine you can have, as the doctors have so often said. I wish we could waft you away at once to some place where it is always summer. But it is worse than vain wishing for the impossible."

"We may at any rate look for a good long time of pleasant weather now. Why, they say it often gets much too hot here."

"For those who have to go about a good deal, perhaps; but we need not fear that for you, dear."

"Dennis should have been back by this, don't you think, mamma?"

"Yes; he should not be much longer now. I'll just set the things—it's about time—so that the tea may be ready when he comes in. He'll need it, for I noticed that he took very little dinner."

"So did I; and I think I can guess the reason. I think he was just a little excited and preoccupied at the prospect of his interview with this lady."

"Very likely. He is greatly taken up with the matter. It was entirely his own idea, you see."

"He has set his heart upon it. And all for me. I do hope he will be successful, not more for my own sake than for his; for I think it will please him so much."

"I am sure it will," said Mrs. Kavanagh.

She was now preparing the table for tea, taking the tray and tea things from a press in a corner of the room. She cut some bread, and then went for a few minutes to the kitchen, to infuse the tea and make a little toast. When she returned to the room again, she went up to the window and looked out, and down the street.

"Here he comes," she said quickly; "and so fast, more running than walking."

"A good omen, mamma," exclaimed Annie.

Mrs. Kavanagh went downstairs to open the door, the sitting-room of the house being on the first floor.

"It's all right; I've got the place, mamma," were Dennis's first words; and he rushed in and past his mother, upstairs to the sitting-room.

"I've got the place, Annie," he cried again ; and he went up to the sofa, bent over his sister, and kissed her gaily but still gently on the cheek.

"Oh, I am so glad !" exclaimed Annie. "Tell us all about it, Denny."

"We had better begin tea first, Annie, and Dennis, I daresay, can eat and talk too."

"Oh yes ; that will be best," said Annie. A faint pink was now in the girl's face, summoned up by her pleased and slightly excited feelings.

"Well, I do feel a little hungry now. I don't think I could have taken much dinner, somehow."

"Of course you didn't ; both mamma and I noticed it," said Annie laughing.

"Did you ? Well, I wasn't aware of it myself at the time. But I'm going to make up for it now, as you'll see. But I can tell you my afternoon's adventures at the same time, for all that."

And Dennis seated himself at the table, his mother handing him a cup of tea and the plate of hot toast.



"Begin by telling us a little of what Miss Pendrill is like," said Mrs. Kavanagh.

"Very well ; I'll try. First, she is an old maid, as we guessed. She is a small, slight, wiry lady, with a rather sharp but pleasant enough face, and very quick eyes—quick, that is, when she has her glasses on, which is generally the case. She has a quick and decided way of speaking, and gets at what she wants to know by asking a number of questions one after the other. I should guess her to be a naturally smart, observing, and business-like person, but not greatly given to what you would call intellectual pursuits."

"Well, I'm sure, Dennis, you've made a pretty careful study of your new employer, both outwardly and mentally, considering your comparatively short interview," said Mrs. Kavanagh, smiling.

"You see, mamma, I felt pretty sure that you and Annie would be curious to know what Miss Pendrill was like, so I took more exact notes of her than I might otherwise have done."

"Very thoughtful of you to be so considerate for ladies' curiosity, I'm sure," said Annie. "But go on, Denny."

"There isn't very much to tell, after all; for though Miss Pendrill put a good long string of questions to me, of course you won't expect me to tell you them all; in fact, I don't think I remember more than half of them. There have been four other applicants for the place besides myself, but none of them seemed quite to please Miss Pendrill. As we all expected, she seemed a little surprised at my applying. But she didn't say much on that point, though I shouldn't wonder if she questions me more closely by-and-by, when we become better acquainted, for I should fancy her a lady of a rather curious turn of mind. She asked me if I understood anything about the kind of work she required; and I told her not very much, but that I thought she would find me very willing to learn. That appeared to please her; and she said that she was always only too

glad to teach her boys as much as she could, but that her complaint was that they were generally so indifferent and careless. Well, in the end she said that she would be glad to try me; and that if I did my duty by her pretty faithfully, she thought that I should find her an averagely good mistress, and not too exacting. That was the phrase she used—an 'averagely good.' She has a rather odd way of expressing herself sometimes, it struck me, a little out of the common. I don't think she would be at all apt to get into enthusiasms, of speech at least."

"And about what she is to give you, Dennis?" said Mrs. Kavanagh.

"Five shillings a week for the first month. After that, if I continue to please her, she wouldn't mind giving me six, she said."

"And is that as much as you expected?"

"Quite; I think it is quite enough for the time given. Don't you, mamma?"

"Yes, I think so. When are you to begin?"

"On Monday afternoon. I shall go each day directly after I have got home and had my dinner."

"Well, dear, the five or six weekly shillings will be a great help to us all—there can be no doubt of that; and though I would not have asked you to do this that you have undertaken, I cannot but be pleased at your thoughtfulness and self-sacrifice, and I am not afraid to tell you so by any thought of flattery. The only thing I feel a little anxious about in this matter, is whether it will not be too much for you with your school-work. Annie and I have been talking about it while you were away."

"If you overwork yourself, you know, Denny dear, I shall feel as if I were partly to blame," said Annie.

"Now, don't you two go thinking and talking like that, please. Haven't I carefully explained all this to you already? and now you just come back again as if I had never convinced you before at all. That's always the way with women. Don't you see that this is quite a different kind of work

from what I do at school. It isn't head-work at all hardly. I allow that if it had been, I don't think it would have been wise in me to undertake it; for I *do* intend to work hard at school, so as to get through with my school education as soon as possible, and be doing something for myself. The sort of employment I shall be engaged in at Miss Pendrill's will be a complete change of work, and ought rather to do me good, especially in the sort of weather we shall have for the next four or five months."

"Very well then, Dennis, we won't say anything more in the shape of doubts upon this point again. But I think you might promise me this, and it will keep my mind easy: if you should happen to find the double work at school and at Miss Pendrill's heavier than you expect, and at all too much for you, will you not try to conceal it either from yourself or from us? Will you promise that?"

"Yes, mamma, I will."

"That's right then. It is very important for all of us, you know, that you should keep your health uninjured at this stage of your life."

"I know that, mamma," said Dennis. "Just half a cup more, please. I think your tea's extra good this evening. Isn't this a splendid afternoon, Annie? This is just the kind of weather to suit you; and you'll see we'll have it straight on like this now for the next three months, with just an occasional rainy day, of course."

"Everybody says it's most beautiful here in the summer, and you can easily suppose it. Some say it's a trifle hot now and then; but you'll not mind that, I know."

"Now, I'll tell you what we'll do; I've been thinking over it coming along home. Saturday, you know, is a whole holiday with us at Ashcombe House. Well, I asked Miss Pendrill if it would suit her as well if I came to her in the morning on Saturdays instead of the evening, and she said it would. So I'll have every Saturday

afternoon free. Now, every fine Saturday, mamma, you and I will have an early dinner, just walk to the end of the street, catch the 'bus which passes exactly at two, along King Street, you know, and get out at the nearest point to Westmoor Downs. The 'bus passes within five minutes' walk, so that our expeditions won't fatigue you in the least. You'll just be pleasantly tired when we get home. And the downs are glorious in fine weather—such soft green grass, such jolly little knolls, and such a grand view of the sea, and the ships going up and down. You will sit and watch the ships far out, and the yachts in the bay, and the sea-gulls, and the brown-sailed fishing-boats, and snuff in the sweet, fresh sea air; and the soft summer breezes will bring back the colour into your cheeks, and you will come back better from every day we go out. It's the very thing the doctor himself would prescribe for you, and you'll enjoy it amazingly."

Dennis ran on lightly and gaily. His mother and sister could not but catch his mood as they



listened, and the spirits of both had been already raised by the successful issue of Dennis's afternoon's negotiations.

"I am sure I shall enjoy it, even if it is something less than you describe, Denny. And what a talent for description you are developing! You're quite a poet—except that word 'snuff.' That's hardly a poetical expression. I don't think I shall snuff, as you call it, at anything."

"It's just the right word though, Annie, and very expressive too; and the more you do it, the better you'll find yourself for the process at the day's end."

"I have been thinking several times for the last two or three days how we could give Annie such a little outing now and then, and your plan will be just the thing, Dennis," said Mrs. Kavanagh.

"What a good brother you are, Denny dear, to think of all this for me!"

"Nonsense, Annie. By-the-by, I might have brought you some flowers from Miss Pendrill's, but I had hardly time to stop while she gathered them.

I was just going when she offered them, and I was a little impatient to get home to tell you my success."

"It was very good of her to offer them to you the first time she saw you."

"Yes; but she has plenty, you know. Still it was kindly of her."

"Don't refuse them next time. They do so brighten up a room, even a few ever so common ones."

"No. If we get along comfortably together, as I hope we shall do, Miss Pendrill may let me gather a little bouquet pretty often, and it will be something rather choicer than that yonder."

Dennis nodded towards a small side table, upon which stood a cheap little glass vase, with some wild flowers,—primroses, buttercups, wild violets, and others,—tastefully arranged in it. He himself had gathered the flowers on his way home from school.

"Don't despise wild flowers, Denny. There is nothing prettier and fresher in their way. Mamma

and I have got a great amount of pleasure from that little bunch."

"Well, I must not talk any more for the present," said Dennis; "for I've got an unusually stiff problem in algebra to work out for to-morrow. If you'll take your book, Annie, and you your work, mamma, and let me have the next hour or so as quiet as you can, I shall be much obliged."

"Very well, then; set to work. We'll promise not to speak half-a-dozen times during the next hour," said his mother.

Mrs. Kavanagh seated herself at her sewing again, Annie took up a book she was engaged in reading, and Dennis settled himself at the table with his school books and writing materials before him. The level rays of the setting sun gilded the walls of the little room, a stillness fell upon it, and the little group, seated in the tranquil evening light made a homely but pleasant tableau.

## CHAPTER III.

### HARD TO STAND.

“For boys are complex things,  
With ways as various and intricate  
As those of statesmen or philosophers.”



SHCOMBE HOUSE was situated in the midst of a country than which our island can show few scenes whereon the eye rests with fuller satisfaction—a happy, smiling English landscape.

The ground in front of the house sloped slowly to the bright smooth waters of the river Wenderley, which, as every one knows, flows into the harbour of Porthaven.

The surrounding country is softly undulating; rounded grassy hills, on which the sheep depasture; still little valleys, shadowed by copses of elm and

oak ; breadths of rich meadow-land, where the dark red Devon kine stand knee-deep in the sweet grass ; a wide prospect of waving corn-fields ; here and there a hamlet snuggled in a cleft between infolding hills ; here and there a snug homestead, a white speck amid the green ; in the distance the line of the Dartmoor hills, dim against the horizon, rounding in the landscape.

Ashcombe House was about two miles from the town of Porthaven. It was a boarding and day school. Most of the boarders remained at school from the Monday till the Friday, returning home on the afternoon of that day, and remaining with their friends till the following Monday.

All these of course lived in Porthaven. There were a few of the boarders whose homes were at some distance, and these lived at the school during the whole quarter. The day scholars walked to and from the town daily.

Dennis Kavanagh, as the reader will have gathered from the foregoing chapter, was a day scholar at

Ashcombe House. After he had been a week at school he had had a pretty good opportunity of judging of how he was going to like it, and the week's experience was not reassuring or hopeful.

He was the only Irish boy at the school; and as he carried about his nationality distinctly manifest in his speech and several traits of manner, he became a marked boy.

His accent was just the sort of thing to be fixed upon by his schoolfellows as yielding a fine opportunity for mimicry and exaggerated imitation. It was a prolific source of merriment—a rare object for the youthful wits to exercise their powers upon.

At first Dennis resolved to think as little as possible of this, with the idea that his schoolmates would, after a while, give it up. He was a new boy, he told himself, and as such must be prepared to put up with something of this kind. All new boys at a school had to undergo some such trial, more or less discomposing, more or less protracted.

But the days went on, and the boys maintained

their attitude of critical ridicule towards Dennis with unusual persistency. It was rarely, it seemed to them, that so good an opportunity for the particular kind of fun they were now indulging in was thrown in their way.

The fun enjoyed by the younger boys at Dennis's expense took a more practical direction. In ordinary cases, a first or second form boy in a school of even the comparatively small numbers of Ashcombe House would have been chary of taking liberties with one in the fourth form. But in the present instance the younger boys saw that they would be quite safe. They very soon understood that any small practical jokes they might devise against the new boy, especially if they were of a sufficiently laughable kind, would not only be tolerated by Dennis's classmates, but by many of them enjoyed. So they set their wits to work, led by the most inventive among them, to concoct little schemes of annoyance against Dennis.

The fourth-form boys, besides their desks, had

each a small wooden locker to keep their books and what not in. These stood ranged in rows against the wall of the upper school class-room.

One afternoon Dennis found his locker with a strip of wood nailed firmly across it, so that it took him much time and trouble to unfasten it, and delayed him a full half-hour in getting home. This piece of work had been secretly accomplished during the mid-day recess.

On another occasion he found his ink-bottle emptied of its contents, filled with sand, and plugged up with sealing-wax. Again, he would get such books as he had left over-night in his locker, with the leaves gummed together in the places he was reading at, until at last he was obliged to carry all his books home with him in the evening—a considerable weight.

Such are examples of a score of similar tricks. Sometimes they were of a less practical but not less disagreeable kind, to one of Dennis's nature at least; and in these cases some one of the older boys had



usually lent a hand. For instance, one day he found, gummed upon the fly-leaf of his Virgil, a slip of paper with the following verses written upon it:—

“ Oh, who can compare with our friend D. K.,  
From the green little island across the say?  
Oh, wasn't he just a sly young rogue,  
With the swatest touch of the Irish brogue;  
And when he spoke, like a clarion rung  
The accents of his native tongue.

“ When you're next in town, just cross the street,  
And question the first pretty girl you meet,  
And I'm sure she'll say, if she isn't shy,  
That there's none so nice as an Irish boy.  
So merry and brisk, so jolly and gay,  
Oh, who can compare with our friend D. K.?”

It was Sam Demerrick who was the author of this piece of facetiousness, which his companions regarded as a genuine *jeu d'esprit*, as they did most of Sam's efforts in the same line. Among the older boys, in fact, Sam was the one who was the chief aider and counsellor of the younger ones. It was a sort of intellectual exercise that was congenial to him. It called upon that part of his mental

resources that was most readily responsive. Anything that promised fun of the sort I am describing, Sam was ready for. Notwithstanding his easy and generally careless nature, he was rather fond of raising merriment and laughter among his companions. He had made the reputation of a wit, was the acknowledged wag of the school, and he derived a certain satisfaction from the position. Though he affected to be careless of it, the applauding laughter which frequently followed his efforts to divert his schoolmates in the way indicated was grateful to him.

It must be here said for Sam that, unlike many persons with a turn for joking, practical and otherwise, he could take as well as give. If his school-fellows played the "booby" trick on Sam, dropped the contents of a can of water over him as he entered his dormitory,—as they had done more than once while he was himself a new boy at the school,—or stitched up the sheets in his bed, or waked him on a chilly winter morning by a sudden adroit

removal of his blankets by means of a cord attached, or played off any other equally agreeable joke upon him, Sam bore it with very tolerable patience and equanimity, as these two qualities go among boys. In fact, he usually displayed under such circumstances a temper that might be considered exemplary; inwardly resolving, at the same time, to be up-ends with his antagonists, whoever they might happen to be, on the first opportunity that offered. He stood verbal joking, chaff, and badinage equally well, or even better. In these cases he always felt pretty sure that he was holding, or, if he chose, could hold, his own against most, and this may no doubt have tended to keep his mind and temper easy.

The reader will agree that it was but justice to Sam to tell this of him, because, as I have said, it is not an invariable rule with persons practising the sort of drollery for which Sam has already shown his leaning,—and further specimens of which will probably have to be chronicled,—to take as gaily as they give.

The attitude which his new companions took up towards Dennis did not, as I have said, lessen much as the days and weeks went on. His hopes of this at length began to give way. He bore his school-fellows' conduct well. He had put the matter to himself thus:—If the action of the boys towards him was what it was merely because he was a new boy, and as such must undergo the ordeal frequently imposed upon new boys, then he must just face it as others had done before him, and would have to do for many a day to come, as cheerfully and unmurmuringly as possible. If the boys were maintaining their opposition to him with the object of thoroughly vexing him, and thereby forcing him to make some display of temper and anger, then Dennis was resolved that he would disappoint them.

After a few days, he felt sure that their conduct towards him did not merely arise from the fact that he was new among them, but was of a more personal kind. This discovery pained him keenly, for

it gave him less hope of terms of friendliness being soon established between his school-fellows and himself. He was sensitive, and one part of the boys' petty persecution especially pained him.

The practical jests played upon him tried his temper most; and he had temper like most other people, though with it he possessed a large amount of self-control for a boy. But the frequent ridicule of his speech and phrases, and the effort which some of the boys made to set him in a laughable and ludicrous light, generally, before the rest, cut him more deeply, and was what he found most difficult to bear.

He succeeded in not allowing himself to be betrayed into any outbreak of temper, which would have been sure to bring upon him increased laughter and ridicule. He managed to retain his ordinary outward demeanour and self-possession, though often unable to control the hot flush that was apt to rise in his face, telling of the inward struggle.

At first Dennis was not above trying to conciliate

his school-fellows; that is to say, he did not in the least humble himself before them, flatter or cajole them; he was above that. But he tried to give as frank and pleasant answers as possible when addressed; for some time he bore the chaff, banter, and ridicule with much good humour, and even endeavoured to disarm or check it by good-tempered replies, and by joining in the laugh against himself. Thus much he was quite prepared and willing to do.

But when this had little or no effect, when the boys seemed determined to push their opposition to him beyond all reasonable limits, then Dennis began to alter his action. His self-respect would allow him to go no further in the direction of trying to win over his school-fellows and turn aside their hostility. He would make no more attempts to propitiate them.

He gave up all hopes of his life at Ashcombe House being a happy or merry one. He saw that it was to be something to be endured, not enjoyed,

but he would, at any rate, endeavour to retain his dignity, temper, and self-control.

He became reserved and self-contained, spoke as little as possible to any of the boys, bore their further attempts to annoy and make fun of him as calmly and with as little show of being discomposed as he could manage, and gave as few opportunities for a repetition of the same as he could.

Thus one who was naturally sportive and game-some enough, who at home had a quiet, playful vein of humour, was ready and quick in jest and verbal fun, became, under the conditions just described, reserved, silent, and shut up within himself. Had you not known the circumstances, you would, seeing him at school, have called him even moody and gloomy.

And this was what some of the boys in his own form did now set him down as; while if he had betrayed anger and temper, they would probably have called him a hot-tempered, passionate, ill-conditioned fellow.

It was rather more than a fortnight after Dennis's arrival at Ashcombe House. The school had just been dismissed. Harry Wright, Sam Demerrick, Arnold Maurice, and Willy Hood were standing at the front gate of the school grounds, which faced the road leading to Porthaven.

"There goes the Hermit," said Sam, nodding in the direction of the road along which the figure of Dennis Kavanagh was seen walking at a quick pace. The "Hermit" was Sam's new name for Dennis.

"Whatever makes him hurry off like that, as if he were walking for a wager, as soon as ever school's over!" said Harry Wright.

"Well, you know, for one thing he has nothing to keep him here. He doesn't join in any of the games—is never asked to, indeed," said Willy.

"But that alone doesn't need to make him walk off at that pace, like a fellow in training for athletic sports. Just look at him. There's something odd and mysterious about that Kavanagh, in my opinion."

"Does any one know anything about his people?"



inquired Arnold. This was a point upon which Arnold Maurice always laid, or affected to lay, stress.

"He's discindid from high gentry, no doubt," said Sam. "Sure they're all kings in their own country the Patlanders."

"But to be serious for a moment, if you can, Sam. Has no one heard anything about where he comes from, or who are his friends?" said Arnold.

"I don't think anybody knows anything more about him than what we have learned here at school," said Willy.

"Which is precious little," said Harry.

"His past may be said to be shrouded in mystery, as the novelists would put it," interjected Sam.

"I never met so close a fellow in my life," continued Harry. "He seems a sulky, moody, glum sort altogether."

"Upon my word, I begin to think, though, that we're all a little hard on him," said Willy. "I don't think he was inclined to be silent and moody,

as you call him, Harry, at first. I fancy he turned that way because we didn't give him much chance of being anything else."

"Pooh! if he had only held out a little longer, and taken things good-humouredly, the fellows would have tired of it by-and-by," answered Harry. "He ought to have recollected, first, that he was a new boy, and had therefore to put up with some humbugging as such; and secondly, he should have seen that there were things about him that the fellows were especially apt to lay hold upon and make fun of."

"Yes; that's the way to put it. There's nothing after all like logic," said Sam, with mock sententiousness.

"I don't know; I think he bore things pretty well at first, considering the amount of plaguing he got," said Willy.

"You're a pattern of boys, Willy," said Sam. "You ought to be put in a book, for you're like one of the fellows you read about. You're such

a champion of the oppressed and the down-trodden already, that what you'll develop into when you've reached manhood's estate, it is difficult to foretell and awful to contemplate."

"That's a rather heavy bit of chaff, old chap," replied Willy.

"But you forget, dear boy, that all are not so preternaturally philanthropic as yourself, that school-boys, in fact, as a rule, will be school-boys."

"No, I don't; but I don't see any reason why all the fellows in the same form shouldn't hit it pretty well together, when there are so comparatively few. I'm sure it's much more comfortable when they do."

"You'd like us all to live merrily together, like the happy family in the menagerie show; eh, Will?" said Sam. "You are of the same opinion as Dr. Watts. You remember his lines:—

'Birds in their nests agree,' sang he,  
The wisest of his sex;  
Because if they *fell out*, you see,  
They'd break their little necks."

"That's a reason that, I daresay, never struck the doctor," said Arnold, laughing with the rest.

"How he seems to be working though, this Kavanagh," said Harry.

"Well, you work pretty closely yourself, Harry ; you can't deny that," said Willy.

"I'm not such a book-worm as he is by a long way. But nobody would mind his fagging as hard as he likes, if he didn't go about with such a long, glum, solemn face, that it gives one the toothache to look at."

"Like a grave-digger at a camp-meeting," said Sam. "Yis, nivr a doubt but he's an intiristing bhoy intirely. I wondher if there's many more loike him at home."

"I always thought the Irish were rather lively, humorous fellows," said Arnold.

"Then this one must be a striking exciption. He must have some Saxon blood in his veins that's done the mischief ; or he may have been castigated when a youngster with a common cane, instid of a twig of the raal shillaly, and that's made the difference."

"Oh, I'd give up that mimicry of Kavanagh's brogue now, Sam; you're wearing the joke rather thin," said Willy.

"Then I abandon it from this moment, Will. I wouldn't for worlds offend your fine sense of fun by 'tearing a joke to tatters,' to alter slightly the words of the much-quoted but too-little-read William of Stratford."

"Meaning whom?" inquired Arnold with a somewhat puzzled look.

"Meaning the immortal, of the pointed beard, and the big white forehead, and his head always leaning on his hand—*vide* all the pictures and statues."

"Oh, I understand!"

"Ah! I thought you'd recognize the portrait. One would think, to judge from most of the pictures, that Shakespeare must have been very subject to headaches, perhaps from over-study, for he seemed to get so much relief from leaning his head upon his hand."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A WIDENING BREACH.

"A trivial act  
Misunderstood, and so between the two  
The breach began, and ever broader grew."



ENNIS'S shortest way home was along the regular road from Ashcombe House to Porthaven. But he now and then turned aside from the highway, and made a slight circuit for the purpose of passing along a lane skirting some fields, where at this season wild-flowers grew in great profusion.

He could only do this on rare occasions, for it was necessary that he should get home as soon as possible, in order that he might be in good time at Miss Pendrill's, in whose eyes punctuality was one of the cardinal virtues, or nearly so.

The lane was a short one, but characteristically Devonshire,—narrow, deep, high-banked, the hedges thickly set with sweet-brier, hawthorn, and wild raspberry, meeting overhead, and all but shutting out the blue sky.

Wild violets, wild hyacinths, lady's-smocks, and red-robin starred the banks; and where the lane ended the ground dipped suddenly into a little shady hollow, where a clear brook flowed into a still brown pool overgrown with water-cress. Beyond the brook lay a small meadow, one glory of daisies and buttercups, clustering so thickly that you hardly saw the grass for flowers.

It was mainly to gather a bunch of wild-flowers for his sister, whose liking for them we have heard her express, and secondarily, to procure some of the sweet fresh water-cress from the brook for general home use, that caused Dennis sometimes to take this route from school.

He was doing so one afternoon among the first days of June. He had gathered as many flowers

as he wanted from the hedgerows in the lane, and was turning into the little hollow, and approaching the brook side, when he became aware of a group of boys seated beneath an elm which grew close to the stream.

The group consisted of Harry Wright, Willy Hood, Sam Demerrick, Arnold Maurice, and two others. Beside them stood a small hamper or basket, part of the contents of which now lay spread upon the grass. The hamper had evidently just been opened, for the good things with which it had been lined were as yet untouched. There was a bag of red-cheeked apples, another of preserved figs, and a third of oranges. Sam Demerrick was just commencing to divide a fine large seed-cake with a clasp-knife, Harry Wright was unfastening a package of sweet biscuits, and Arnold Maurice was engaged in drawing the cork from a bottle of ginger-wine, while the two boys, Dent and Barclay, were looking on with an expression of lively interest and anticipation. Willy Hood, the actual pro-



prietor of the hamper, seemed really to be the least concerned in the general management of its contents. He was taking no part in the adjustment and distribution of his property, and was looking on with a face that curiously contrasted with those of his companions, by reason of the much smaller interest which it indicated.

“A tolerably well-lined basket, Willy boy; but I miss the couple of pots of jelly that came last time,” said Sam, coolly contemplating the various articles. “Not that we could have used it now, of course, for we have no bread; but it comes in handy for tea, for a change. Your *mater* must have left the packing of this to some of the maids, I fancy. I can’t imagine she would have herself neglected to send the jelly, when she knows—for you told her, I am sure—how it is appreciated at Ashcombe House.”

“I wouldn’t make an affidavit that I told her, Sam; but if you particularly wish it, I’ll write and mention the omission. Is there any special kind of

jelly that you like more than another? Don't mind saying so if there is."

Willy said this with perfect gravity, and Sam replied in a like tone, while the rest were laughing.

"They're pretty good hands at jams all round your folks, and I've an impartial taste myself in such matters. The same as before will do quite well—red currant, if I remember rightly. But you needn't write home specially on this matter. Just mention it in your next, and put it in a P.S. Nothing like a P.S. to fix the attention, except a P.S. Number 2. But I vote we make a beginning somewhere. Suppose we lead off with a drop all round of the G.W.—Take care how you're carrying that bottle, Arnold. It isn't a bottle of medicine, 'to be well shaken before taken.' Carry it steady, man."

Sam spoke of the ginger-wine as if it had been port of a rare old vintage, and would suffer materially from careless handling.

At this point, just as the boys were beginning to

their banquet, Dennis Kavanagh came in sight. The boys saw him before he noticed them.

"Hallo! the Hermit, by all that's melancholy!" said Harry Wright. "What brings him this way?"

"By the pricking of my thumbs,  
Something gay and cheerful, and everything  
That's jolly, this way comes,"

hummed Sam in a kind of sing-song chant.

Dennis suddenly abandoned his purpose of gathering any cress from the brook, and quickened his pace slightly. He was uncertain whether the boys had observed him; and if they had not, he was not desirous of attracting their attention.

But an idea had occurred to Willy Hood. Dennis, as he walked along homeward, struck him as presenting a very solitary and lonely figure. All the rest of the day-scholars walked home from school in twos and threes, Willy knew.

"I'm going to ask him to join us," he said suddenly; and before his surprised companions could reply, he was walking quickly to overtake Dennis.

"Well, upon my word," began Sam; "but there, one oughtn't to be surprised. It's just like Willy. But I hope to goodness he doesn't come—Kavanagh, I mean. He'll just be a wet blanket to our fun, and feel awkward himself, I should think. But Willy never thinks of that."

Sam needed to have no anxiety. When Willy Hood had reached Dennis's side, he said,—

"Kavanagh, will you join us? I've just got a small hamper of things from home. There's plenty for us all."

Dennis was certainly surprised, and his face revealed it. For a moment he did not reply. But he could not accept the invitation.

First, it was necessary that he should be at Miss Pendrill's that afternoon as punctually as on any other, so that duty would have prevented him, even had he had any desire to join his school-fellows in their merry-making.

But, as you may suppose, he had no great desire for this. He could not have felt at ease and com-

fortable among them himself, and his presence would only introduce an element of constraint and awkwardness into their fellowship.

Moreover, Dennis felt a disinclination to accept benefits which he knew he should not be able to return in kind. There was, perhaps, a little false pride in this last objection on his part; but it existed, and had its weight in influencing Dennis's action.

These several reasons quickly determined Dennis in his reply. Although he could not accept his invitation, he was really grateful to Willy for proffering it; for there was no mistaking, from the boy's manner, the kindliness of his intention.

As Dennis looked down from his superior height into the frank, honest, somewhat serious, and withal handsome little face, he felt almost sorry to be obliged to refuse his school-fellow's invitation. If he could he would have accepted it, if it had simply been to show that he was not insensible to Willy's friendly advances. But all he could reply was :—

"Thank you, Hood; but I cannot join you this afternoon."

Dennis was quite aware that this reply might seem to Willy a somewhat insufficient one, for he had given no reason whatever for not accepting the invitation. But he could not enter into explanations there and then. To begin to explain at all, he must have entered fully into his whole reasons for not being able to join Willy and the rest, and he felt that he could not do that now. Neither did time permit it, nor were the place and the circumstances favourable. He had of necessity, therefore, to content himself simply with declining Willy's invitation in as kindly a tone as possible.

His reply did seem an insufficient one to Willy. He felt rebuffed. He felt that he had gone a little out of his way in making this advance towards Kavanagh, or, at any rate, that he had done a thing that most boys would not have done under the existing state of things between Kavanagh and his schoolmates.

He knew that his companions would look upon what he had done as rather an odd and unnecessary proceeding, but he did not care much for that. But when he had gone so far, had met Kavanagh half-way, as it were, and had shown a disposition to befriend him, it seemed to him that it would have been more graceful, to say the least, in Kavanagh if he had met his advances as frankly and in the same spirit as he had made them.

He was a little puzzled as to what could be Kavanagh's motives in acting as he did, but concluded that it must be mainly from pride—a form of pride from which Willy himself was free, and with which he had little sympathy.

Willy was one who liked to communicate his pleasures to others. A pleasure was not half a pleasure to him unless he could share it with his friends. The only child of parents in easy circumstances, he had had few wants or wishes which had not been gratified; but he had grown up to his present age unselfish and unspoiled.

While desirous of making their son's life a bright and happy one by indulging him in all reasonable pleasures, his parents had, at the same time, impressed upon him the duty and the grace of sharing the pleasant things of which his own life was full with those of his companions who were less fortunately situated in regard to worldly circumstances; and they had found in Willy one who needed little to be prompted in the direction they desired.

Willy imparted to his companions out of the fulness of his own possessions with a free and generous hand, and looked for no return, in kind at least.

As Dennis Kavanagh continued his walk homewards, he pondered not a little on what had just occurred, and his thoughts were rather of a sad sort. He had not failed to notice that a slight cloud—a shadow—had passed into Willy Hood's face on his replying to his invitation with a negative. He was almost sure that Willy felt hurt and rebuffed, and the thought gave him trouble.



From his first few days at school, he had felt that if there was one of all his school-fellows that he would have sought and liked as a friend, it was Willy Hood. For one thing, he had taken less part than any by a good deal in the opposition which had been set on foot against him—had taken no active part in it, in fact, though he had now and then joined in the laugh against him with the rest.

But it was not for this alone that Dennis had felt drawn to him. He liked his look. It seemed to him a manifestly trustworthy, kindly, gentle one. Willy looked to Dennis like a thorough little gentleman.

And now, when an opportunity seemed to present itself for the two becoming better acquainted, it had slipped from Dennis unsecured. Not only so, but he had probably repulsed Willy past remedy, so as to render it very unlikely that the latter would ever again make such advances as he had done to-day.

Willy's friendship once secured, it might have ended in the establishment of a pleasanter state of things between himself and some others than at present existed ; for he knew that Hood exercised a large amount of influence among his school-fellows. Everybody liked him, and most of the older boys added respect to their regard.

But all chance of this being brought about now was gone for the present, at any rate, and most likely for ever. The idea was a depressing one to Dennis, and the thought that it could not have happened otherwise, and that things were as they were through no fault of his, was, I suspect, but small consolation to him at this present moment.

But he tried to hope still that an opportunity might one day be afforded him of proving to Willy Hood in some way or other that he cherished a grateful feeling towards him for what he had done that day, and that the relations between them might yet become those of kindly regard for each other, if not of intimacy and friendship.

When Willy Hood rejoined his companions, he was at once accosted by Sam.

"And so the Hermit declined your invitation, eh, Will? Mightn't you have guessed that he would prefer the solitude and quiet of his cell to our rude and boisterous company?"

Sam's burlesque was entirely distasteful to Willy at this moment.

"I have no doubt he had good reasons for not joining us, Sam," he replied, with a studied quietness, but with an emphasis in his tone. "He has probably to get back to Porthaven by a certain time, for some reason; or perhaps the prospect of your company had no irresistible attractions for him."

As not unfrequently happens in such cases, Willy had here stated, in his first reason for Dennis not accepting his invitation, the exact truth of the matter, though he himself did not believe that he was doing so.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Will, I'm glad he hasn't joined us," said Sam.

"All the same, it wasn't very mannerly of him to refuse, Will," said Arnold. "An ungentlemanly thing, I consider."

"Well, let's bother no more about him now," said Sam. "It was handsome and good-natured, and all that, of you to ask him, Will, and bad form in him to refuse, considering all the circumstances."

"I don't know," said Willy.

"My dear Will, you're of far too trustful a nature—think too well of people; that can be overdone you know. When you grow up, I'm afraid you'll be taken in on all sides, unless you become a little less good. In fact, Willy Hood, you'll be often *hood-winked*."

The boys were now busily occupied in diminishing the various contents of the basket, displaying a uniformity of appetite characteristic of the genus school-boy. It would have been difficult to assign superiority to any of the group in particular.

But Willy Hood was an exception to the rest. He partook much more sparingly than his com-

panions of the good things which he had himself been the means of providing. Not that he was superior to such indulgences at most times, but to-day he seemed to care little for them. In fact, his thoughts seemed turned in quite other directions, and while his companions chatted and laughed on, he was comparatively silent and self-absorbed.

But this wore away by-and-by, for Willy was naturally of a bright and even temper, thoughtful as he sometimes was. Dennis Kavanagh, and what had just occurred in relation to him, had been pre-occupying his mind for a little; but now the mood of his companions communicated itself to him, and he was soon laughing and talking as freely as the rest.

When at length the boys felt each and all a sufficient sense of satisfaction, the relics of the feast were put back into the basket against a future occasion, which we may suppose would not be a distant one.

"Have any of you heard Sam's new song?" said Jack Dent.

There was a unanimous answer in the negative from the rest.

"He's given me a verse or two of it," continued Jack; "and I vote he now gives us the whole of it."

"Yes, let's have it, Sam," said Harry Wright.

"*Ignis via. Incipe*," said Willy.

"I've no objections," said Sam. "I call it—

#### PROVERBS AND PATCHWORK.

"Early to bed, and early to rise,  
Makes a heavy head and sleepy eyes;  
And early to rise, and early to bed,  
Makes sleepy eyes and a heavy head;  
For beauty's but skin deep, and Greek's a mocker,  
But you can't go wrong if you stick to Cocker.

"Of all good maxims this the chief is,  
That a bird in the hand of time the thief is;  
And of all bad proverbs no one worse is,  
Than from guinea-pigs' ears you may make silk purses;  
For it's just as clear as the sun in the skies,  
That the proof of new brooms in the sweeping lies.

" 'A wet sheet and a flowing sea!'  
The nightingale sang in the old elm tree;

'There's nothing,' sang she, 'can cheer the heart  
Like ginger-wine and a damson tart;'  
For you'll lie like a warrior taking your rest,  
If you'll only do your level best.

"Said Nelson, 'England expects her sons  
Shall each and all stick to their guns;—  
Stick to your guns,' said he, 'holy-stone your decks,  
And you're sure to keep sheer of squalls and wrecks;  
But sooner or later you'll land in muti-  
Ny, if you chatter too much about duty.'

"'Come fill up my cup, and fill up my can,'  
Is the safest motto for every man;  
For bread in the can, and tea in the cup,  
Is the question that's always turning up;  
All else is hollow, and fame's a bubble,  
And Latin spells nothing but toil and trouble."

A round of applause followed Sam's song, which he gave in a kind of monotonous recitative, which in itself had a ludicrous effect.

"Well done, Sam," cried Willy, with genuine admiration. "I think that's the best thing I've ever heard you do."

"Yes, it's rather a jolly bit of nonsense. Give us it over again, Sam," said Harry.

"No, no! that's enough of it for to-day. I'll give

you some *encore* verses another time, perhaps. But how the time's run. I'll have to be back to the house : I've my French exercise to do for to-morrow."

The boys rose from the ground, two of them took the basket between them, and the group began to return to the house.



## CHAPTER V.

### A FAINT HEART.

"Into his cheek the hot blood rushed,  
And mantling o'er his forehead flushed."



DICK BARCLAY bore a grudge against Monsieur Ponder, the French master at Ashcombe House. Dick had thrice in succession neglected to bring the weekly French exercise, and Monsieur Ponder, not unnaturally exasperated by the cheerful equanimity which Dick displayed when remonstrated with about the matter, had reported the case to Dr. Marsh.

This was more than Dick expected. He had looked for an imposition, of more or less weight, from monsieur, and this would not have disturbed him; but that the French master should have re-

ported the matter to Dr. Marsh, he regarded as treatment quite out of proportion to the offence, and as a decidedly underhand and unworthy act.

None of the fourth-form boys liked being reported to Dr. Marsh. They were the only boys who ever were reported to him; the other two masters, as well as the occasional masters, taking the punishment of the rest of the school, when punishment was necessary, into their own hands.

Any case of a fourth-form boy, therefore, that was reported to him, Dr. Marsh always treated with some gravity in proportion to the nature of the case. In the instance in question, Dick Barclay received a pretty sharp reprimand, in addition to some task-work after school hours.

Dick's resentment was excited against monsieur. He persuaded himself, without much difficulty, that he had just grounds for feeling aggrieved, and he was indignant and angry accordingly.

I don't mean to say that his feelings in regard to the French master were of a very bitter or deadly

kind ; but he considered that Monsieur Ponder's conduct had been sufficiently deceitful and in every way unfair to warrant his paying him back in some way or other on the first opportunity that offered.

Such a chance as he wished for occurred on the next French day. Monsieur Ponder was short-sighted,—that is, he used spectacles for seeing things at a distance, but when he looked at objects close to him he did not require them.

On the day in question he was correcting exercises at his table, as he usually did during the first part of the lesson. As his habit was, when occupied in work of this kind, he had pushed back his spectacles upon his forehead.

He was looking over Dick Barclay's exercise. Dick had not been so hardy as again to omit to write it ; and now he was standing beside the master's chair. But though his eyes were bent upon the paper, his thoughts were otherwise engaged. Even as he stood there the resentful feeling which

he had conceived against Monsieur Ponder was stirring in his breast, and his brain was revolving various plots.

For a couple of days back his mind had been actively exercised in this direction, but as yet without any results that satisfied himself. But now, as he stood by Monsieur Ponder's side, his eyes fell upon the master's spectacles, and a brilliant idea took sudden possession of him.

As monsieur's head bent down over the paper, Dick lightly and adroitly slipped back his spectacles with his pen over his forehead till they rested on the crown of his head. The master went on with his work unconscious and undisturbed.

"The best theme I have had from you for a long time, Master Barclay. I hope that your lazy fit has now passed quite off, and that you are going to be diligent for the remainder of the term."

And the worthy gentleman handed Dick's exercise to him with a little smile. He was thinking at the moment that whatever method of correction

Dr. Marsh had adopted with Dick, it had had a most salutary effect.

Most of the class had seen Dick's little manœuvre, and had guessed his intent. Fun was anticipated, and a smothered chuckling among some of the boys showed that they were already enjoying it in prospect.

Dick's exercise was among the last to be examined. When Monsieur Ponder had done with this part of the hour's work, he turned himself to other duties, the reading and translating of the day's lesson, &c.

He now required his spectacles, that he might command the whole class more readily, and keep as vigilant an outlook as possible over its general conduct; and the boys, it is perhaps unnecessary to mention, required all his watchfulness.

He felt on his forehead for his glasses. They were gone. His hand wandered vaguely and aimlessly about his brows. He looked puzzled and perplexed.

"It is very strange. I am almost certain that I had them on me," he said aloud; "I always do; but perhaps I put them on the table."

He looked about the table, among the books and the papers.

"No, I cannot see them anywhere. It is most strange. Did any of you see them, boys?"

No one answered.

"Did any one see my glasses?" he repeated, in a slightly louder and more peremptory voice. He was beginning to suspect some trick.

Dennis Kavanagh was sitting on one of the back forms. When Dick Barclay had effected the adroit movement in relation to Monsieur Ponder's glasses, he had been busily occupied in looking over the French lesson for the day, and had not noticed Dick's action. He was quite unconscious of any piece of fun being on foot.

He had scarcely heard Monsieur Ponder when he put his question the first time, for he still had his attention fixed upon his grammar. Owing to press

of other work he had prepared the lesson for the day somewhat less thoroughly than usual, and had been endeavouring to make up for this at the last moment.

When monsieur repeated his question, Dennis looked up at him from his book. Monsieur looked not a little comical. He felt wholly at a loss without his glasses, and in addition to this he was puzzled as to what could have become of them, while at the same time vaguely impressed with the idea that some of the boys were at the bottom of the mystery. Altogether he was a good deal put out and perplexed, and his mingled emotions were revealed in his face. It wore a queer, confused, puzzled, and helpless expression that was highly diverting to most of the boys.

Dennis could not help smiling a little with the rest—monsieur looked so incapable and put about for want of his glasses. But it never occurred to him that the boys wished to carry on the joke any further. He thought that they had had their laugh

and were satisfied. Without thinking twice about the matter, he said,—

“You have pushed your glasses back too far, monsieur. They are on your head.”

Monsieur raised his hand to his head, recovered his spectacles, placed them on his nose, and in a moment was himself again.

“Ah,” he exclaimed, “how ridiculous! But I do not remember ever doing that before. But let us get to work now; we have lost time.”

But Dennis himself had hardly finished speaking when he perceived that he had done something which ran counter to the general wishes of the class.

Dick Barclay's desire had been that Monsieur Ponder should be left in ignorance as to what had become of his glasses, if he did not discover them himself, till the hour went over. That he should suffer a few minutes' inconvenience merely, was by no means enough for Dick. His discomposure and annoyance should last, if possible, at least throughout the rest of the lesson.



Dick had communicated his wish and intention to several of his neighbours, and the matter had circulated through the class. It had been agreed in whispers that if Monsieur Ponder proceeded to the extremity of questioning the class individually, each was to answer that he had not "touched the glasses."

Almost all anticipated high fun and entertainment from the plot; for monsieur would be quite at a loss during the rest of the hour without his spectacles, and each might pay as little attention to the work in hand as he chose, or do pretty much whatever seemed best to him, provided he did it with little noise, and monsieur be little the wiser.

But Dennis's simple speech upset everything. A slight hiss, perceptible to Dennis, but hardly so to the master, ran through the class, significant of its feelings in regard to what Kavanagh had done. Dennis saw at once that he had spoiled sport.

But, as may be supposed, it was Dick Barclay who felt by far the most incensed against Dennis.

He saw his prospect of sport, and of paying back monsieur in kind in a manner that would have left him with a comfortable feeling of satisfaction that he was now up-ends with that gentleman, suddenly slip from him.

His purpose was balked ; the opportunity he had cudgelled his wits for two days past to bring about in some fashion,—which had promised so fairly,—had escaped him when on the eve of bearing fruit.

He was deeply incensed, and he felt a strong indignation against the cause of his mortification and of his defeated purpose. Throughout the remainder of the lesson—which now proceeded very much as usual, for the rest of the class by-and-by forgot almost entirely what had just occurred—Richard Barclay sat, self-absorbed and moody, like the fiery Ulysses, plotting mischief in his heart.

Afternoon school was over, and the classes dismissed. Dennis Kavanagh was leaving the prem-

ises, traversing the playground at his usual rapid pace at this hour. But, quick as his pace was, he was overtaken by another boy before he had reached the school-ground gate.

A voice in a quick, peremptory tone called his name, and he turned, to be accosted by Dick Barclay, accompanied by his companion Dent.

"Here, you, Kavanagh! Stop a moment; I've a word to say to you."

"Well?"

"There's an account to be squared between you and me. What did you mean by spoiling fun this afternoon in that fashion? Couldn't you have held your tongue? I wanted to pay old Ponder out for reporting me to 'Mergo,' but you upset everything with your confounded blundering. What did you do it for?"

"Mergo" (*Anglice*, a marsh) was the familiar name for Dr. Marsh among his pupils.

"I knew nothing about what plans you had, Barclay," answered Kavanagh, quietly.

"I don't believe you. You must have seen that none of the rest of us were going to say anything about the spectacles."

"I did not know that."

"I tell you I don't believe you," retorted Dick. "You just wanted to spoil our fun, for some reasons of your own; and a mean and sneaking way you took to do it. But I intend to let you see that we don't stand that sort of thing here. If you like to try those sort of tricks, you must be prepared to defend them. I'm going to fight you about this matter, that's the long and short of it."

My boy readers will be aware of the astonishing and mysterious rapidity with which the news of a row spreads through a school. It would seem as if most school-boys could scent the indications of a fight from afar.

There had been one or two only of the Ashcombe boys loitering about in the vicinity during the above dialogue. These had gathered about Barclay and Kavanagh, and, seeing that there were decided

prospects of an interesting quarrel, some one of the number had slipped away to spread the information, and a ring of boys now encircled Dick and Dennis.

Dennis turned slightly pale at Barclay's last words, but his tone was firm as he replied,—

“I cannot fight you, Barclay.”

“Can't fight! Why, may I ask, pray?” said Dick, with all the contempt he could put into his tone and manner.

Dennis did not answer. He was not afraid of Barclay. His reason for not wishing to fight was just this: Dick was, though not taller, a decidedly more powerful boy than himself, and, Dennis saw, would in all likelihood have mastered him, however spiritedly he himself might have fought.

Dennis would not have cared much for being beaten, and could have stood a little rough usage easily enough; but supposing he received any disfigurement of person at Dick's hands, as would almost to a certainty be the case, how could he appear before Miss Pendrill,—Miss Pendrill, the

neat, and orderly, and proper, who disliked all that was rough, uncouth, and offensive to the eye, who had old-maidish and perhaps ultra-strict ideas of what was seemly and becoming, and who, in a word, would have been shocked and scandalized beyond expression at Dennis appearing before her with a blackened eye or a scarred lip?

Dennis knew his employer well enough to be certain of this; and he felt sure, too, that if he did so appear before her, she would be certain to question him, and of course he should have to tell her the facts; in which case he felt that his character would be materially damaged in her eyes, and the result might be that, at the end of the present term of their engagement (he was engaged by the month), she might not seek to renew it.

All this passed through Kavanagh's mind in much shorter space than it takes to tell. His situation at Miss Pendrill's was at present of great importance to him. Any shame or disgrace he might incur among his school-fellows by declining to fight Bar-

clay was as nothing to the risk of losing his afternoon employment. And the terms at present existing between his school-fellows and himself were not of such a cordial or agreeable kind that it would make much difference if the breach between them became still a little wider.

But it will at once be seen that none of these reasons for his action could Dennis explain to Barclay and the rest. So he stood there silent, with a face some shades paler than ordinarily, but with a firm, set look upon it; his arms folded.

"A model for a Roman senator! A regular Marc Antony for dignity!" exclaimed Sam Demerick, with mock solemnity, and striking an attitude in extravagant imitation of Kavanagh.

"Dignity!" said Dick Barclay, contemptuously; "if he has any dignity about him, he should be a little better able to defend it."

"Have a round or two with him, Kavanagh; I'll be your second," said Willy Hood.

"Thank you, Hood; but I cannot fight."

"Perhaps his blood wants stirring up a little; and as he spoke Dick Barclay raised his hand, which the next moment would have fallen upon Kavanagh's cheek had not Willy Hood, who was standing next to Dennis, suddenly struck aside his arm, and the meditated blow fell harmless.

"No need for that sort of thing, Dick. You're not like the youngsters, I hope, who think it necessary to strike 'coward's blows.'"

Dick turned towards Willy with an angry look upon his face. He had not an especially hot or bad temper, was about average in that respect, but he had gradually worked himself up to a high pitch of anger this afternoon, and had, to a great extent, lost control over his passion.

He was not in a mood to take easily anything that checked or thwarted his present temper, even coming from Willy Hood, who was a friend.

"What do you mean, Will? This is no business of yours. Don't you interfere, please!" he exclaimed hotly.



But Willy was the most popular boy in the school; and Dick's words met with no favour among the rest. Dick could have well-nigh pounded Willy to mince-meat without much difficulty; but their school-fellows would never have suffered him to maltreat Willy if, carried away by anger, he had attempted to do so.

"There! that'll do, Dick; don't pick a quarrel with Willy. Stick to the matter in hand," said Jack Dent.

This little parenthetical episode had not improved Dick Barclay's temper, and he turned upon Kavanagh again with an added flash in his eyes.

"Will nothing make you fight, you cur? Do you call yourself a man, and afraid to stand up like one?"

Kavanagh's face changed from pale to scarlet at the insulting words. His blood boiled up within him, and rushed into his cheeks. He made a step forward as though about to fall upon his opponent, then suddenly checked himself. A vision passed

before the boy's eyes—of a sick girl for whom the days were brightened and rendered a little more cheerful by the results of his labour after school hours, results that might cease if he now gave way to the hot passion and indignation that were burning in his breast: he paused, turned his back upon the group of watchful boys, and without a word hurried hastily away.

For a moment there was silence among the group, and the next a volley of hisses and cries of supreme derision was launched after Kavanagh.

“Coward! coward! cur! cur!” arose on all sides, while some of the smaller boys gave vent to their feelings by shouting out, as a variety, the cry of “Cowardy, cowardy, custard!” which, though they may seem to have little significance as written words, appeared to contain a great force of opprobrium in the eyes of the youngsters, and to yield them immense satisfaction in the utterance.

The mocking and scornful shouts of his school-fellows followed Kavanagh until he was out of the

school grounds and along the highroad. But he heeded them not. He never turned his head, but walked fast on his way, his face still hot and burning, his heart excited and beating, a mingled feeling of indignation, pain, and heaviness of spirit oppressing his breast.

In the gibes and insulting cries which the boys had launched at Kavanagh several of the older ones, to their credit be it said, had not joined, and among these, as might be expected, was Willy Hood.

But on the faces of all, young and old, the same look was more or less visible—that of contempt. Even Willy's face was not altogether free from this expression, though it was less marked on his than on that of any of the rest, and was mingled with a look of perplexity, as he gazed after the retreating figure of Kavanagh.

“Well, he's made a poor show, certainly,” said Harry Wright. “Why couldn't he have had a round or two with Dick and have done with it?”

"I don't know; I can't make him out," replied Willy slowly.

Harry, Willy, and Arnold Maurice were walking back together towards the house.

"Make him out! I can't see that that's very difficult," said Arnold in the drawling voice that sometimes marked his speech. "Seems to me pretty clear that he's not got two ounces of pluck in him."

"Yes; I don't think it requires a magnifying glass to see that, Will," added Harry Wright.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A SHABBY COAT.

“So strange the guise—  
Perplexed, he scarce could recognize  
The altered form.”



ONE Friday afternoon Willy Hood was walking along through Porthaven towards his home. It was past six o'clock. He had stayed some time at school after the classes had been dismissed, for a game of cricket; and on his way home through the town he had gone a considerable distance out of his direct course to call at the cottage of an old man who dealt in pigeons and other fancy birds.

Among some other pets Willy kept pigeons, and his business with old Peter Whipple this afternoon was to negotiate for a pair of fantails. The bargain

had been concluded on terms satisfactory to both parties concerned; and Peter was to bring the pigeons to Willy's home on the following day.

Willy had thus been delayed beyond his usual hour of getting home on Friday afternoons, and was making up for lost time by walking at a quick pace. Peter Whipple lived in a much humbler quarter of the town than Willy, as may be supposed, and Willy's way back led him through Bennet Street.

He had just turned into Bennet Street from Union Street, when he saw a figure a short distance in advance of him which struck him as familiar. It was that of a boy, walking fast like himself.

Surely Willy recognized him, and yet outwardly he was somewhat changed from his ordinary appearance; the change consisting in the circumstance that the boy wore so much commoner and shabbier a coat—such a coat, in fact, as Willy himself would not have cared to be seen in.

Willy quickened his pace still a little faster. His curiosity was stirred; there was no denying it.

He wished to discover if his suspicions were really true, though he felt almost confident that he was not mistaken. He gained a little upon the boy.

He had not gone fifty paces further, when the figure in advance stopped at a house, ascended the short flight of steps that led to the door, and rang the bell. As he did so, he turned the side of his face to Willy. He had not been mistaken. It was Dennis Kavanagh.

Willy thought he might pass by unnoticed by Kavanagh, and, somehow, he wished that it might be so. But almost at the same moment that he recognized Dennis, the latter's eye caught sight of Willy hurrying past. The next moment he was inside the house, and Willy did not see the flush that rushed into his cheek.

"A little later this evening, are you not, dear?" asked Mrs. Kavanagh. "And, Dennis, whatever made you come home in your old coat?"

"Why, mamma, just as I was leaving Miss

Pendrill's, I noticed that the honeysuckle that trails over the summer-house had broken away in one place from the woodwork, so I asked Miss Pendrill for a hammer and some nails, and fastened it up again ; and just as I was finishing, I tore a rent in the sleeve of my coat somehow. It caught in a nail. I think I was in rather a hurry, as the job was taking me longer than I expected ; so I thought it better to come home in my old coat, and bring my other in a parcel, as I have done, for you to mend. Hardly anybody knows me in Porthaven, you know, so I thought it wouldn't matter my walking home in the old coat for once."

" Well, perhaps not, my boy," answered his mother a little slowly. " But you might have met some one of your school-fellows."

" Well, the fact is, I thought I might just as well wear the old coat as my other, with a long tear in the sleeve. There was not much to choose between the two as regards looks ; but as luck would have it," and here Dennis's voice took on a slightly vexed



tone, "I did see one of the Ashcombe House boys. He passed just a moment or two ago. It was a fellow called Willy Hood. I think you have heard me mention him to you before; what could have brought him along this way, I can't say. I know he lives quite at the other end of the town."

Mrs. Kavanagh and Annie knew very little of the exact state of things between Dennis and his school-mates. Dennis did not wish that they should, for he knew that it would only give them pain on his account.

So he had not only never given the slightest hint as to the far from cheerful or pleasant character of his life at school, but he had now and then taken occasion to talk a little about several of his school-fellows, and to give his mother and sister slight sketches of their different characters as far as he knew them, so as to preclude even a chance of suspicion on their part of the real state of things.

He had quite succeeded in this object; and I think

that the deception involved in the accomplishment of it was of a character that may be pardoned by the most rigid of moralists.

Mrs. Kavanagh did not fail to notice the slight tone of vexation in her son's voice, arising, as she easily inferred, from some feeling of shame on Dennis's part at being seen by his schoolmate in his shabby old coat. But she thought it better not to show that she noticed anything; and Annie thought the same, for she too had been as quick to detect what her mother had done as Mrs. Kavanagh herself.

"Well, after all, what *does* it matter?" continued Dennis, after a pause. "Willy Hood is one of the most sensible fellows in the school, and would be the last, I'm pretty sure, to think any worse of a fellow for seeing him in an old coat; and even if he does, it doesn't signify much."

Mrs. Kavanagh and Annie little knew what meaning Dennis's last words had for himself. Anything he might do now would indeed make small differ-

ence in the terms upon which he stood towards his school-fellows.

The three now seated themselves at the tea-table. Dennis turned the conversation to other subjects, resolved to put from his thoughts what had just happened. It was, after all, too slight a matter that he should allow it to discompose him.

“What I’m going to tell you I don’t want you to mention to any of the other fellows. You must promise me that.”

The speaker was Willy Hood, and he addressed Harry Wright, Sam Demerrick, and Arnold Maurice. It was the Monday morning following the events just narrated.

“No, no; we’ll be as dumb as waiters—dumb-waiters, of course,” said Sam; “but it must be something dreadfully mysterious, Will, that you swear us in, in this way, like so many conspirators.”

“No; it isn’t anything very wonderful after all, though it puzzles me a bit. But there’s no need to

spread the thing through the school, as I said before. Well, it's about Kavanagh, and I can tell it you in two sentences.

“On Friday afternoon, as I was going home from old Peter Whipple's,—the rabbit and pigeon man, you know,—coming along Bennet Street, I saw a fellow ahead of me whom I thought I knew. But he wore such a shabby old coat that I could not be certain that I knew him. I walked a little faster to get nearer him, for I was rather curious. He stopped at a house in a terrace; and as he entered the door, he turned his head half round, and I at once recognized him. It was Kavanagh.”

“Whew!” exclaimed Sam.

“And I declare,” continued Willy, “the coat he was wearing was not a bit better than Jim the gardener's boy wears, old and faded and worn, hardly fit to—to—”

“To scare crows with, say,” put in Sam.

“Well, hardly so bad as that; but it was really very queer.”

"I always had a suspicion that there was something queer and mysterious about the fellow's people, and this story of yours makes me think so a good deal more," said Arnold.

"The plot thickens, as the play-writers say, certainly," said Sam.

"I don't know why you should have had any suspicions about his friends, Arnold," said Willy. "You can't know anything about them one way or the other."

"That's just it. That alone's enough to make one suspicious. He's always been so silent and secret from the first day he came to the school—never mentioned his friends to any one, as far as I have ever heard. Nobody knows a bit more about him or his than on the day he came."

"The Nabob doesn't think it natural that a chap shouldn't tell you, the first time he meets you, who his ancestors are, at least as far back as his great-grandfather and great-grandmother. But we haven't all such a prodigious pedigree as you to boast of,

old man, and so, of course, we're not all just so ready to reel off our ancestry, on every opportunity, to a dozen generations back."

This was a pretty hard hit at Arnold, but he didn't show that Sam's words moved him much, for he answered, "I can't help being born a gentleman, Sam. I'm sorry it offends you, though."

"That's not so bad, my boy; a fair retort, though a confoundedly snobbish one all the same," said Sam.

"There, that's enough sparring. Let's go for a swim," said Harry Wright.

"I wonder if we'll ever get any nearer to solving this mystery about Kavanagh, though," said Sam. "It's getting quite interesting; I shouldn't have thought that anything about the fellow would have been so much so."

"I doubt if you'll find the affair worth spending your curiosity upon, Sam, after all," said Harry.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN ADVENTUROUS QUARTETTE.

"'Tis, I wot,  
A weird and solitary spot,  
Where black bats haunt, and foxes prowl,  
And nightly hoots the crazy owl."



ONE Monday morning, just as Willy Hood was entering the school-ground gates, he was met and accosted by Sam Demerrick and Dick Barclay. Sam linked his arm in Willy's.

"Will, there's a wonderful story got up here since Friday. Of course you can't have heard of it, but you'll soon hear enough about it. The place is all a-buzz with it. Kelly, the gardener, they say, was coming home on Saturday night from spending the evening with an acquaintance, a farmer at Denethorpe over there. He made a

short cut home through Dingle Wood, and the way he took led him close past Clyffe Priory. Well, just as he was passing by the old chapel, he happened to look in at one of the windows, and saw something that seems to have given him no end of a start. He saw, he says, a tall white figure standing at the other end of the ruin, pointing up the chapel with uplifted arm. He admits that he was awfully scared; but still he says he saw the thing plain enough, and is very confident that he is under no delusion. Dick here has had the whole story from his own lips."

Dick Barclay was a quarterly boarder at Ashcombe House.

"Yes; Kelly told me it all on Sunday morning. He seemed to want to tell it to some one."

"And do you fellows believe it?" asked Willy.

"Well, I don't say I do," said Sam; "but it's a curious thing. You see, if Kelly was at all given to tippling, one might easily put down his ghost to the effects of gin-punch upon a not remarkably



strong brain. But Kelly never takes anything stronger than cider, and not a great deal of that. So that this can't be a case of spirits breeding spirits."

"But, as you say, Sam, Kelly hasn't either the strongest or clearest of intellects, though he's a tolerably good garden hand, and suits Mergo's requirements here well enough. If he fancied he saw something like what you describe, I think it very likely that he would be so astonished, and perhaps frightened too, as not to be in a condition to take a very cool and collected view of the matter."

"But, you see, he brings back a clear enough story," said Sam. "However scared he may have been at the time, he is cool enough now, and he sticks firmly to it that he saw exactly what he reports."

"Well, his scare would make him see with exaggerating eyes, I think."

At this point the boys were joined by Harry Wright and Arnold Maurice.

"Talking about the white spectre of the ruined chapel, of course," said Harry lightly. "Well, do you know I have just discovered something that may perhaps help you to explain, or, at any rate, understand, the mystery better. I have been reading an old history of the county in the library, and in referring to Clyffe Priory it says that there once existed among the country people a superstition that the chapel was haunted by one of the old monks. But the ghost seems to have gone to rest some time back, for nobody appears to have heard anything about it for a long while. Now perhaps this is the old fellow returned again. Perhaps his appearance is periodical, every ten years or something; or maybe he wants a little change and fresh air from the musty old vaults under the chapel."

"So there *is* some ghost story then connected with the place," said Sam. "I wonder if Kelly knows about it."

"Why, Sam, you seem half inclined to believe Kelly's story. I did not think you were so super-

stitious. Aren't you above that sort of thing, man?" said Arnold, in a slightly lofty tone.

"No, no; I don't believe the thing any more than yourself, Sir Lofty-High-and-Mighty," replied Sam with a laugh. "But I thought you would rather have gone in for ghosts, old man; we all know that every old family like yours keeps a private ghost. Haven't you got one round about Denison Chase?"

Arnold did not condescend to make any attempt at an answer to Sam's jesting.

The story of Kelly the gardener and the apparition at Clyffe Priory continued to be the chief topic of talk among the boys for a day or two, and then began to die out, when it was revived with increased force by the intelligence, brought by Kelly, that the spectre had again been seen by a friend of his, a gardener on a gentleman's estate close by.

By-and-by the boys at Ashcombe House heard that the matter was becoming talked about through the country-side, at the small farms and cottages,

and among the village folk. The story of the old monk was being revived, and elderly people were refreshing their memories in regard thereto, and recalling by-gone tales current in their young days.

A certain amount of awe was spreading through the school, more especially among the younger boys, and when the matter was discussed, it was not unfrequently with lowered breath, and faces a shade or two graver than ordinarily.

It was about a week after Kelly had seen the tall white figure with the uplifted hand in the old ruined chapel of Clyffe Priory, that Sam Demerrick said one afternoon to Dick Barclay,—

“Dick, will you join me in a plan I’m going to propose?”

“Let’s hear what it is. If there’s going to be any fun in it, I daresay I may.”

“Well, it’s just this: are you game to go some night and explore this mystery of the Priory, and settle the matter?”

Dick paused a minute, and then replied rather slowly,—

“Well, I don’t mind. There doesn’t seem much sport to be got out of that, any way ; but I’m game to do what other fellows do, I reckon. Do you mean that we two should go alone?”

“No! Harry will go with us ; and I mean to ask Arnold. Between ourselves, I’m going to ask him chiefly to see what kind of stuff he’s made of. I don’t think he’ll refuse, whether he fancies the thing or not, but we’ll see how he comes out in the trial. I don’t say he’s a bad-plucked one—I’ve had no chance of judging one way or the other ; but if he gets a bit of a start from anything that may happen in the course of our night’s expedition, it may take a little of the starch and stiff collar out of him, and that’ll be worth the seeing, I fancy.”

“When do you think of going?”

“To-morrow night, say. Kelly says he saw the ghost just about eleven o’clock, so we’ll time ourselves to reach the Priory at that hour. Of course

this is a secret. You won't mention it to any one."

"All right. Let me know what Arnold says."

Harry Wright and Sam Demerrick spoke to Arnold Maurice about the proposed expedition together, and contrived to put the matter to him in such a way that they had little difficulty in persuading him to join them. He looked upon their proposal as an attempt made in all seriousness, out of the simple desire, and nothing more, to get to the bottom of the mystery. He saw nothing beyond this, touching himself more particularly, and suspected nothing.

The chief object with Harry and Sam was, no doubt, curiosity in regard to the story of the Priory spectre, and the desire to explore the matter further for themselves; but with this was combined a small conspiracy against Arnold. They were rather hoping that something would occur of a slightly startling nature, to see how Arnold stood it, and with the anticipation that possibly there might

be occasion for some fun at his expense, both at the time and afterwards, when it could be reverted to for more leisurely enjoyment, and used against him as a groundwork for banter. Of course, they themselves resolved to be prepared beforehand for any crisis that might occur; and being thus forearmed, they believed themselves secure from showing any signs of confusion or alarm.

On the following night, when the rest of the occupants of their dormitory were deep in slumber, and all the lights were out in the house except that glimmering through the window of Dr. Marsh's library and study, the four boys—Harry, Sam, Dick, and Arnold—slipped from their beds, and silently and rapidly dressed themselves.

Noiselessly they let themselves out at one of the windows—an easy matter to effect, as their dormitory was on the ground-floor. It was a clear, still summer night. Above the distant line of hills a round bright moon was rising.

A walk of half an hour brought them to Dingle Wood, a small belt of oak and ash, in the middle of which, on a slight incline, stood the old ruin of Clyffe Priory.

On summer noontides the vicinity of the Priory was a pleasant enough spot, congenial for picnic and open-air festivity, with shady alleys, smooth-swarded slopes, and sunny spaces between. But at night its aspect was not so cheerful. Then it was a pretty solitary and lonesome place. With the withdrawal of the day all life and lightness departed from it. Even a bright full moon, such as that of to-night, availed little to dispel or illumine the thick shadows and gloom that surrounded and enwrapped the old ruin of Clyffe Priory.

The boys had hitherto been walking at a quick pace, but as they drew near the Priory their speed slackened a little. They hadn't spoken a great deal during the whole walk.

"This will be the best way to get a good view



into the chapel," said Sam; and he led the way round to the side of the building, proceeding with a decidedly cautious step, and keeping a secret but vigilant outlook all around him.

"This will do, I think," said Harry.

They were standing in front of one of the windows, and close to a portion of a low broken wall, moss-covered, and at its base a thick, rank growth of grass and weeds.

"I vote we get up on the wall, and then we'll get a clear look up the whole length of the chapel," said Dick. "If the old monk's stalking around anywhere, we can hardly miss seeing him from here."

The four boys climbed up upon the wall, and perched themselves on the top, in a half-standing, half-kneeling posture. They did not feel themselves over and above secure in their position, and found it advisable to steady themselves by grasping projecting corners of the stone, or by twisting their hands among the roots of the ivy.

Their gaze was now directed upon the interior of the ruined chapel, and through the window they commanded a survey of its whole extent. The moon was now high in the heavens, and its light, penetrating in slender shafts through the spaces in the wood, illumined the ruin and its surroundings with a pale radiance.

For the space of five minutes there was silence among the boys. Their eyes were fixed in the same direction upon the interior of the chapel. A profound silence reigned around. Nothing broke the deep and solemn hush of the place. The boys could hear each other's breathing. Each felt the silence becoming somewhat oppressive.

"I can't see anything an atom like a ghost; can any of you? It's all a hum. We might have known that if we hadn't been a parcel of fools. I'm about tired of this. It's getting monotonous, and not very comfortable either, perched up here like bears in the Zoological," said Dick.

"Kelly must have been drunk that night, al-

though he isn't given that way," said Arnold. "His friend the farmer must have been too pressing with his cider or gin-punch, or whatever it was, and Kelly must have given in for once. That's the explanation of the whole story, as I daresay we may find out some day."

"And what do you make of the other man seeing it too?" asked Sam.

"Case of grog on the brain with him as well," said Dick.

"Let's wait a bit longer, any way; we've been here no time to speak of. Perhaps it's not quite time yet for the ghost to walk. How goes the enemy, I wonder? Did any one bring his watch?"

"Yes; I've got mine," said Arnold. "I thought we might want to know the time, so as not to be too long away, or we might happen to be missed." Arnold held the face of his watch towards the moonlight. "It's just eleven."

"I say!—look there!—what's that?" exclaimed Dick in a hoarse whisper.

All eyes were again instantly directed towards the interior of the chapel, and now became riveted on the same spot. There, at the other end of the ruin, stood a tall white figure, with one raised arm pointing up the chapel—pointed, it seemed to the boys, directly at them.

Each of the four boys was conscious of a peculiar and not exactly pleasant thrill passing up from the soles of his feet to the roots of his hair. It wasn't much at first, and each tried to convince himself that it was nothing akin to fear, but merely surprise and astonishment, feelings that would have been natural enough to any one under the same circumstances.

But, somehow, the intention which Harry, Sam, and Dick had fully agreed among themselves to put into practice, if an opportunity should occur—namely, of narrowly watching Arnold, and taking notes of how he bore himself in the event of anything of an unusual kind turning up—seemed to have passed entirely from their minds.

Sam did glance once at Arnold, when it struck him that his face looked a shade or two whiter than ordinarily ; but Sam was not sure but that if Arnold happened to look at his face just at that moment, the same idea might strike him. So, on the whole, he judged that whether an occasion did or did not arise before they got back to school, of carrying out their intention in regard to Arnold, which had seemed so easy only an hour ago, it was not practicable just at present.

The gaze of the four boys seemed fascinated by the object on which it rested. But very soon it became not an agreeable sort of fascination. The creeping sensation of which they were sensible all over did not lessen but increased. They became suddenly aware that they had highly sensitive nerves in every inch of their bodies.

The tall white figure stood motionless, just in front of the largest window in the ruin. The uplifted arm seemed to point at the boys with an awful air of reproof and warning.

The hands that grasped the broken stonework and creeping ivy tendrils grew damp and clammy and tightened their clutch. A cold perspiration began to ooze from the brow of each of the . watchers.

“Look! he’s coming towards us!” said Dick in a hoarse whisper.

It looked to the boys actually as if the tall spectre was lengthening and drawing slowly towards them, the upraised arm stretching nearer and nearer. The watchers heard the beating of each other’s hearts.

“Boys, I’ve had enough of this,” whispered Harry in a voice that he strove hard to keep firm. Even at this moment he did not forget that he was captain of the school, and that things were expected of him in the way of example in other directions besides that of class-work. So he tried to show as bold a front as he could, but was only indifferently successful. “I ain’t frightened, you know, exactly; but it isn’t very comfortable this sort of thing, I’ll

admit that. I don't understand it, and I vote we go home."

"I second that," said Dick; "and the quicker the better. There'll be time enough going back for any fellow who wants to explain things."

"Oh! what's that!" exclaimed Arnold.

Something dark flapped suddenly against his face with a cold clammy feeling, and then flitted past like a shadow.

"Why, it's only a bat, man," said Sam.

But Arnold's exclamation had given them all a start for the moment, and they had hardly recovered themselves when Arnold cried out again in a hurried voice:—

"Look out! the wall's giving way!"

The words had hardly left his lips when there was a sudden crashing sound, and Arnold fell headlong forward. Grasping at the nearest thing to him, he clutched Sam by the legs; Sam knocked against Harry as he fell; and Harry, in trying to recover his balance, stumbled upon Dick; and the

four boys fell to the ground, one above the other, in a confused and struggling heap, bringing down with them a mass of crumbling stone and earth.

Arnold had involuntarily raised his hand to his face when the bat brushed against it, had thus for the moment relaxed the hold which had hitherto kept him steady on the wall, had lost his balance, and hence the catastrophe.

Each of the boys was for a moment a trifle stunned and confused by his fall. Dick, who was uppermost, was the first upon his feet; and after a few seconds occupied in ruefully rubbing his shoulders, while his scattered wits gathered themselves together again, he turned his attention to his companions.

Harry was soon up again, and presently Arnold too, who, from his slighter and lighter build, had fallen more easily than any of them. Not so Sam. He was weightier by a full stone than the rest, and his loose, stout, and somewhat unagile frame had



contributed to make his tumble heavier and more awkward by a good deal than that of his companions.

He lay huddled together in a heap, half-buried in the tall grass and weeds, looking stunned and bewildered, and as helpless as a tortoise on its back. Harry and Dick each gave him a hand; and with some rather unceremonious tugging and hauling, lifted him from his damp couch, and set him on his feet.

The four boys stood looking at each other. This sudden and unexpected *contretemps* had driven all other thoughts from their minds, and ghosts and apparitions were for the moment forgotten. Each was slowly rubbing his face and hands, for each was aware of a similar sensation in those parts of his body—a sharp, pricking, stinging sensation.

“Why, confound it all!” burst forth Sam at last, “we’ve tumbled in a bed of nettles, to make matters worse; and I feel as if I was bruised and scraped on every inch of my body without that!”

It was true enough. Among the thick rank growth of weeds upon which the boys had fallen nettles bulked largely—a tall, strong crop, that looked as if they possessed the maximum power of sting possible to the genus.

“Here! let’s get away from this place as quickly as we can!” said Sam in a voice from which all signs of sportiveness had entirely vanished. “I’m as sore all over as if I’d been rolled down a mountain in a cider-barrel.”

“Yes, let’s be off! It’s no sort of use staying here any longer!” said Dick, and even as he spoke he began leading the way from the spot.

“See! he’s coming nearer to us than ever!” whispered Arnold. His eyes were now again directed to the chapel, and his words recalled the attention of the others to the same quarter. It may have been that the boys’ imaginations were in an abnormal condition of excitement, and their wits generally somewhat unsettled; but it certainly did seem to them again that the spectral figure had

advanced at least a couple of yards nearer to them since its first appearing. They were not sufficiently collected to reflect that if the ghost had any sinister designs against them, his advance would hardly have been so deliberate.

They watched the apparition but for a few moments longer. They were convinced that it was making steadily if slowly for them, and they had no mind to await its further advance. Their tumble had given them an additional fright as well as a pretty rough shaking, and the combined manhood of the four was not now equal to the facing of one ghost.

Dick quickened his pace, and the rest followed close upon each other's heels. It was more than a fast walk. It was a run, neither more nor less, and this was maintained until a good three hundred yards lay between them and Clyffe Priory.

When their speed slackened into a quick walk, they drew together abreast again. All were a little out of breath, and for a short space no one spoke.

"Well, this has been a jolly foolish night's work, anyhow!" said Dick.

"It has, and no mistake!" said Harry. "But there's no use blaming anybody, Dick; we're all in the same box, I reckon!"

"I didn't say we weren't; but I didn't propose the thing, any way!"

"Now, what do you want to be at, Dick?" said Harry, a little sharply. "You were just as willing to go as the rest; you can't back out of that."

"All I say is, it's been a mighty poor piece of fun from first to last," persisted Dick, doggedly. Dick was haunted with the recollection that Harry and Sam had been the proposers of the expedition; and with the feeling strong upon him at the present moment that he had been led a sorry chase with most unsatisfactory results, when he might all the time have been sound asleep in a comfortable bed, he naturally felt that he wanted to worry some one.

"There, don't get to bickering, you two," said Sam, who, as the prime deviser of the night's scheme, felt

that the less said about its origin the more comfortable for all parties.

But Sam had now, to a large extent, recovered his presence of mind and general equilibrium, and felt impelled to play upon Arnold a little, though with by no means his usual confidence as to results. "I say, Arnold, old man, I think you must have been a trifle scared when you let go your hold that time. What did you take that bat for, eh?—another ghost? If it had been a vampire making at you, you couldn't have turned whiter. You should have seen your own face. It was paler than the ghost itself, by a long mark."

But Sam's intention was completely frustrated by Dick's saying, before Arnold himself had had time to retort,—

"It won't do, Sam; Arnold wasn't any more scared than the rest of us, far's I could see. There wasn't a penny to pick and choose between us."

Dick was determined to be contrary. He now felt considerably more aggrieved against Sam and

Harry than against Arnold, though the latter had been the cause of the tumble; and it was grateful to his spirit, in its present mood, thus to thwart Sam.

Sam very quickly perceived Dick's humour, understood it, and saw that nothing was to be gained by pursuing his attempts upon Arnold at present. So he dropped the matter at once. Little further conversation passed among the four boys during the remainder of their walk back, and when they reached the house, and let themselves in again at the window, an almost total silence had fallen upon the quartette.

Scarcely so much as a good-night was exchanged among them as each slunk off to his bed. All were tired, stiff, and sleepy, roughened in temper and unhinged generally; each harboured against the other a vague feeling of soreness, for which he would have found it difficult to give reasons.

All were impressed with the conviction that bed was the one thing in the world that could do them

any good, and all were supremely happy to be beneath blankets again.

No one felt very heroic; all were conscious that the night's exploit had been a defeat at the least, and an ignominious one at that. Perhaps this feeling was more present with Sam and Harry than with the two others, for in their case there had been a double defeat of intention.

But a night's experiences such as have been described, somewhat varied and disturbing as they were, are not sufficient to keep tired youth long awake. Each of the four boys was soon oblivious of the night's episodes, or if these entered at all into their slumber, they did not avail to break its swift course.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### UNRAVELLED.

"Lucent, bright,  
But incorporeal, impalpable  
As air or summer moonlight."



NIGHT'S sleep made a considerable change in the aspect with which the boys regarded the adventures of the previous evening. Moreover, whatever slight feeling of resentment they had had towards each other had well-nigh disappeared. The events of the night were, of course, the first topic of conversation when the four found themselves alone together.

"Well, it's a puzzling thing, say what you like," was Dick Barclay's comment, delivered in a reflective manner. All the boys now felt themselves capable of viewing and discussing the question in a



much calmer and more philosophical spirit than last night.

"Do you really believe it was a ghost, Dick?" asked Arnold slowly.

"I don't know what to think. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it. But what can you make of it? There it was, plain enough; and each of us saw it as clear as the other."

"And not a very cheerful sort of sight either," said Harry. "Not that I was afraid, you know, but it was an unusual kind of thing to see, and would have given any fellow a bit of a start."

"No! I wasn't afraid either, but I felt rather like that, Harry, too," said Sam.

"Oh, none of us was what you would call frightened,—not downright afraid, you know," said Dick; "but no chap could have helped feeling a little all-overish like."

The boys now felt convinced, one and all, that the feeling with which the apparition of Clyffe Priory had inspired them, could not, by any fair

and accurate method of designation, be called fear.

"There's no use letting the whole school know about this matter, though. It's just as well to keep it to ourselves, I think," said Harry.

"Yes; I vote that," said Arnold. "This mystery—or whatever you like to call it—may get cleared up somehow or other; and meanwhile it'll be best for us to say nothing at all about what we've had to do with it. We don't want every youngster in the school talking and giving his opinion about it."

The four agreed that, all things considered, it would be advisable to adopt the course above suggested. Yet, notwithstanding, the whole story of the four boys' midnight expedition to Clyffe Priory by-and-by spread throughout the school. Little by little it oozed out, until there were very few who were not in possession of a tolerably accurate notion of the circumstances.

I am disposed to think that it was Dick who had proved less discreet than his companions, and less

alive to the binding nature of the agreement which had been entered into by the four companions to preserve a strict silence on their adventure at Clyffe Priory. It was from hints dropped by him, I suspect, that the circumstances crept out. The hints got pieced together, and so welded, in the mysteriously ingenious way in which things of this sort happen, into a consecutive whole, representing pretty faithfully the facts of the case.

The story, of course, did not lose anything, except exact truth, by the process through which it passed before it became the general property of the school. It was asserted, for instance, in some quarters, that the apparition had brandished in its hand a huge sword, with which it had threatened the boys. It did not occur to those who affirmed this item of the narrative that a sword was hardly an appropriate or probable accessory to the ghost of a monk.

It was also rumoured that the spectre had rushed furiously at the four boys, and pursued them for a

distance of some hundred yards, and that the latter had been obliged to exert their utmost speed in order to effect their escape.

These additions to the exact facts were no doubt due to some lively imaginations among the boys; but though they tended to increase somewhat the wonder and marvel of the affair, they did not materially alter its main outlines.

The midsummer holidays at Ashcombe House were now drawing near, and preparation was being made for the examinations which were held at this season.

One evening, when Dennis Kavanagh had finished his school-work for next day, and put away his books, he said to his mother,—

“Mamma, I’ve a plan to propose that I hope you won’t have any objections to. I don’t think you should. You know that our examinations begin in a little more than a week from this. Well, now, it would be a great convenience for me if I could remain at school all next week—board, I mean. You know I have worked hard through the quarter,

and I hope to get a couple of prizes at least, and to be first in two classes. I want to stick as close as I can to my work during the next few days, and, of course, I should save a good deal of time by not coming home every day. Now, don't you think I might do this just for the week?"

"And how do you propose managing about your duties at Miss Pendrill's?"

"I have mentioned the matter, and told her exactly the facts of the case. She at once agreed to let me away for a week. She can get along very well without me for that time, she says, and I think myself that my absence will make very little difference for a few days. I thought it best to speak to Miss Pendrill and get her consent before mentioning the matter to you. And now it only remains for you to say whether you mind my boarding at the school from now till the breaking up. We can easily afford that much, I think."

"Quite; and I have no objections whatever to your proposal, Dennis. It will no doubt be a great

ease to you in every way not to be obliged to return home each day, now that you wish to put out a little extra labour on your school-work. Of course, Annie and I will feel a little dull here by ourselves, we are so little accustomed to being separated; but it will be for a very short time."

"And we shall be well repaid, Denny, if you are thus able to make a still better appearance in the examinations than you would have done, though I know you would have taken a good place in all your classes in any case," said Annie.

"Don't expect too much, Annie. A good place in *all* my classes! I can't promise that, and I hope you are not looking for it, or you'll certainly be disappointed. It's really too much to ask from a fellow who is by no means a genius, and knows it, I hope; though his sister may persist in thinking him something not far from it, and expect great things accordingly. And you forget, too, that there are some pretty smart fellows at Ashcombe House--far cleverer than I am."

On the following day Dennis spoke to Dr. Marsh, and it was easily arranged that he should board at the school during the remainder of the term. At this time the talk about the apparition at Clyffe Priory and the midnight expedition of the four boys to the scene was in full current.

Dennis, as has been said, had very little intercourse of any kind with his school-fellows, and especially with those of his own age and standing in the school. But there were one or two among the younger boys with whom he was on somewhat more friendly and intimate terms. These were boys to whom he had once or twice lent a timely helping hand in their lessons, and who could not but cherish a feeling of gratitude and kindness towards him.

Among these was little Fred Royce, a bright, blithe, and kind-hearted youngster, who was really the only boy at Ashcombe House with whom Dennis could be said to be familiar. But Dennis had generally contrived that his intercourse with Fred

should be as private as possible; for he had the idea that Fred would add nothing to his own popularity among his schoolmates by being intimate with him—an idea in which he was perhaps right.

From Fred Royce Dennis heard the whole story of the four boys' visit to Clyffe Priory. Of course, he had heard random snatches of the talk about the ghost, but, owing to the terms on which he stood with his classmates, he had had no consecutive account of the matter until he heard it from Fred.

His curiosity was roused somewhat by hearing Fred's story, and he put several questions to him as to what he knew about the boys' attempt to solve the mystery.

"But surely you don't believe all this, Freddy! you talk as if you half did," he said.

"Well, there it is, you see. I don't know whether I believe it or not. Perhaps I don't. But it's a puzzling thing, ain't it? and it's yet to be cleared up."



The story at length reached Dr. Marsh. The other masters first picked it up bit by bit, and they spoke of it to the doctor.

Dr. Marsh thought it a matter that ought not to be allowed to pass altogether unnoticed by him. It was inadvisable that such a farrago of nonsense should be occupying the boys' thoughts to such an extent. So one afternoon, just before the classes separated, he referred to the matter at some length, and with some seriousness.

I am not going to record in detail what he said. It was all very good sense, and quite to the point; but there was nothing very new or original in his remarks, as you will understand there could hardly be on the subject.

He told the boys how foolish a thing superstition always was, and how it was always the sign of a lower stage of civilization, and that if education accomplished anything at all it ought to have the effect of destroying every kind of degrading superstition. Then he said that much as we had advanced

in civilization, a great deal, far too much superstition, he was sorry to say, still remained among us. It was a thing that died hard. Even well educated people were found believing every now and then in the most impossible absurdities.

He was sorry to hear that a story had got abroad among the boys that was an example of superstition of the most absurd kind, such as he thought even the youngest of his pupils would have treated simply with laughter. He concluded by hoping that after what he had said he should hear no more of this foolish story, and that the boys would at once banish it from their thoughts and conversation.

This is merely a brief outline of the doctor's little lecture. There were portions of it somewhat profound for a good many of his hearers, though very little in it, as I have said, that was remarkably original.

The boys listened to it with more or less of attention, and the older ones understood most of it. On these latter, too, it may have made some impression ;

but upon the majority, I am afraid, its wisdom and logic were little better than lost. Twenty-four hours after the doctor's words were uttered, their effect upon the mass of the boys was incalculably small.

There was a very general opinion, openly expressed in some instances, tacitly held in others, that the case was one which no mere words could clear up, however profound and logical. It was all very well for the doctor to deliver a learned lecture on superstition in the abstract, but there was the fact that had yet to be cleared up.

There were now quite a large number of witnesses who could testify to having seen the apparition with their own eyes. It was still no doubt to be seen every night at the Priory. If the doctor would give them any satisfactory explanation of this particular case of supernatural manifestation, or if he would himself go to Clyffe Priory by night, and investigate the matter and solve the mystery, that would be to the point and conclusive.

But merely a discourse on the foolishness of superstition in general was not sufficiently convincing to the boys in the face of the present facts, and they felt that they wanted something more definite and practical. And so the spectre of Clyffe Priory still remained a topic of frequent conversation among them, and maintained pretty nearly its former place in their thoughts.

But it must not be supposed that there were none among the boys who were incredulous regarding the ghost of the old monk. There were one or two who had no faith in the story. Harry, Arnold, and Sam would, I think, have been among these latter, had they not had such striking experiences to shake the scepticism they might otherwise have felt.

Willy Hood was one who, though he was quite unable to offer any explanation of the mystery, believed, and always declared, when asked his opinion, that it would be cleared up some day. Dennis Kavanagh was another who was of the same way of thinking; but the thoughts that the matter gave

rise to in Dennis's case took a more practical direction than with Willy.

He began to feel a desire to investigate the matter for himself. Personal curiosity had something to do with this, but another motive also influenced him. He well knew that ever since his refusal to accept Dick Barclay's challenge he had been regarded by his school-fellows as destitute of all proper and manly spirit.

The scene of that afternoon had recurred to his mind more than once, and the recollection was still an unpleasant and somewhat bitter one. He was not superior to a feeling of annoyance and bitterness that he should bear the reputation of a spiritless fellow among the boys, when he knew that, as far at least as anything in his conduct at Ashcombe House had proved, he had given no real cause for being so regarded.

He had hoped that one day an opportunity might occur of convincing his school-fellows in some way that he was not altogether what they took him for

in this respect; but as yet no such chance had befallen him. In this affair of the Clyffe Priory ghost he thought he saw an opening such as he had waited for.

One night, during the week he was boarding at the school, when he felt sure that the rest of the boys in the dormitory were asleep, he let himself out of the window as Harry, Sam, Arnold, and Dick had done, and made his way, with all the speed he could, to Clyffe Priory.

He took up his position at one of the ruined windows of the chapel, and directed his eyes towards the interior. There, sure enough, at the farther end of the chapel he beheld a tall, spectral-like appearance, in a white flowing robe, and with one arm uplifted. All was pretty exactly as had been described to Dennis by Fred Royce.

Dennis had expected to see something. He could not believe that the whole fabric of the ghost story had been raised on no foundation whatever. He was little surprised, therefore, at the sight of the

tall white figure, and not at all startled. He had come looking to see something; and now that he had seen it, his immediate business was to endeavour to solve if possible this ghostly riddle.

After watching the white figure from a distance for a few moments, and not getting a much clearer conception of it, he stepped quietly into the chapel, and walked along to the farther end. His footsteps rang on the worn stone pavement as he advanced, wakening the hollow echoes of the old ruin.

In a few moments he had reached the side of the white figure. A step or two further, and he stood in the middle of the figure, the ghost's long gown flowing all around him. He was standing in the centre of a space of bright, white moonlight. Monk, and gown, and arm, and sword were moonlight.

Dennis looked up at the window immediately in front of him, and beheld the full bright moon through its ruined arches. In a few minutes he took in the whole circumstances. The explanation of the mystery was as clear and plain before him as a solved

problem in Euclid. Had any one been close to Dennis at that moment, he would have observed on his face a rather peculiar expression, indicative of satisfaction and quiet triumph, not unmingled with a tinge of contempt.

He had nothing further to detain him on the spot. In fact, it was advisable that he should get back to the house as speedily as possible; for there was written law at Ashcombe House against boys leaving the premises after the dormitory lights were once extinguished, law which Dennis was now breaking.

Dennis knew well enough that he was infringing rules, but he had reasoned with himself that if he were successful in the object he was seeking—that is, if he dissipated, for good and all, this marvellous legend of the Priory spectre—perhaps the end would warrant the means.

Now that he had been successful in his object, more easily and quickly even than he had anticipated, he determined to tell the whole matter to Dr. Marsh; and he hoped that the result of his visit to Clyffe



Priory would justify his action, contrary to rules though it was, in the master's eyes.

Dennis let himself in at the window of his dormitory, and got to bed again, without disturbing any one in the room.

Next day he sought Dr. Marsh in his study between morning and afternoon school. He told his story in as few words as he could, but at the same time sufficiently fully and clearly, and the master listened to him to the end with scarcely an interruption.

"The moon is just now nearly at its full," said Dennis in the course of his narrative, "and shines right into the north window of the chapel. The stone of the pavement is of a white sort, as you may know, sir,—sandstone, I think it is,—and has got whiter as it has worn away and been bleached by the sun and weather. When the moonlight falls upon it, it leaves a very pale reflection; and from a distance the sheet of light that falls through the window looks a good deal like a tall figure in a

white gown. One of the cross-pieces of the stonework of the window, too, has recently given way, and fallen down; and the light falling through the space makes the reflection on the pavement look as if it were stretching out an arm."

"Well, Kavanagh, you have certainly given a very clear and intelligible explanation of the whole matter," said Dr. Marsh with a slight smile when Dennis had finished. "I must compliment you for the exact notes you must have taken on the spot. And now this is what I am going to do. This afternoon I shall repeat your story, just as you have told it to me, to the boys. That little lecture I gave you all a day or two back has had, I suspect, not much effect with the most of them; for Mr. Curtiss tells me that this foolish story has still a considerable hold upon their minds. But now your discovery will at once set the whole matter at rest. I have to thank you, Kavanagh, for you have done me a real service. I have been not a little disturbed to find how strong a hold this absurd story

had taken of the boys' imaginations, and somewhat perplexed how further to act. I do not forget that you were acting contrary to regulations in being out of bounds at that hour, but we shall say nothing about that. Your motive was a good one, and it would be hardly fair or consistent in me to enforce the rule in this instance, at the same time that I accepted the service which I admit you have done me."

That afternoon to the assembled school Dr. Marsh repeated what he had heard from Dennis an hour or two before, almost in the latter's own words. He concluded by a few comments of his own:—

"I will say here that Kavanagh has done me, personally, no slight service; and I now publicly thank him for it, as I have already done in private. I have been a little perplexed how to act in order to dispel from your thoughts this nonsensical story that had got abroad among you; for I have discovered that what I said on the point the other day has made little impression. I was not only annoyed

by the idea that so foolish a piece of superstition should be swaying your minds to a considerable extent, but also by the fact that it was interfering with your preparation for the examinations, as I suspect has been the case, by distracting and disturbing your attention.

“I must say, also, that I consider Kavanagh has shown a praiseworthy degree of courage in this affair; courage of a quiet, unostentatious, but real and admirable kind, as I think you will all see and admit. I think that the majority of you have had some feeling of fear in regard to this spectre of the Priory. I don't blame you very much for that. Older people—some, at least—might have felt the same; but I thought that many of you might have been above such a feeling. Well, Kavanagh has proved himself superior to any such vague dread. He has quietly explored the mystery, met the ghost face to face, and laid it for good and all.

“I now hope that what I have told you has already expelled from your minds any remnant of

belief in the Priory spectre ; but that you may be all practically and finally convinced, I shall take the whole school—the boarders, that is—to Clyffe Priory to-night. The ghost will be on sight for a few nights longer ; just so long as the moon lasts, neither more nor less ; and you shall, one and all, have an opportunity of seeing it for yourselves, and of what stuff it is made. To-night, then, at the proper hour, we shall repair to the Priory in a body, myself at your head.”

And so the doctor concluded, in a light and humoursome vein, a speech that had been begun in a grave and serious tone.

The boys listened to him with the greatest attention throughout ; and most of what he said caused them, as will be imagined, much surprise and astonishment. The feelings which the speech produced in their minds were various, but decidedly the predominant one was a sudden and total change of opinion in regard to Kavanagh’s courage. Not a boy among them could now pretend to any doubts

on that point. Dennis had done in this affair as well as the boldest of them could have done, and better than the majority. All felt this, and that whoever had set him down in their own minds as a poor-spirited fellow must henceforth keep silence.

Several of his classmates gathered round Dennis when the boys were out in the playground again. Not a few came forward to shake him by the hand, and among the first of those thus to greet him was Willy Hood. A change of feeling towards Kavanagh among his school-fellows had set in that afternoon.

"Well done, Kavanagh; you've managed the matter jolly cleverly, and no mistake!" said Willy Hood heartily. "Not one of us could have done it so well if we had tried!"

"You would have done just the same yourself, Hood, if you had thought of it," said Dennis, smiling.

"I'm not so sure of that. I didn't think of it,

anyhow, nor any of the others ; and you've done it, and settled the matter once and for all, and I consider it a pretty plucky thing too !”

“ Yes, you managed the business neatly, I think we'll all admit that !” said Harry Wright. “ I dare say we would have found out just what you did the night we visited Clyffe Priory if we had stayed a little longer, or if we had been a trifle cooler. But things were against us that night. There were too many of us for one thing, and one only confused and flustered the other. In fact, we didn't go about it in the right way at all.”

There was no attempt at concealment now on the part of the four boys — Harry, Dick, Sam, and Arnold—of their visit to Clyffe Priory. They knew that all the school had been in possession of the circumstances connected with that expedition for some days, and that to make any secret about the matter now would have only been apt to make them ridiculous. But Harry felt urged at this juncture to try and make some sort of explanation

of the failure of his and his companions' attempt to get to the bottom of the Priory apparition.

"There's just one thing I don't yet quite understand, Kavanagh," he continued; "we all thought we noticed that the figure advanced—slowly, no doubt, but still we thought it did get nearer to us."

"Well, perhaps I didn't stay long to notice that," said Dennis; "but if that was the case, I think I can explain it. You see, the longer you remained the lower the moon would be sinking, and so the reflection thrown through the window upon the stone floor would grow longer,—that is, it would stretch further up the chapel, and so appear gradually to draw nearer to you."

"Yes, that must just have been it. I quite see how it was now," said Harry.

Had any one who did not understand its meaning witnessed the scene presented as the entire inmates of Ashcombe House, with the exception of Mrs. Marsh and the servants, started in a body, close upon midnight, for Clyffe Priory, he would have



thought it a somewhat peculiar one, and might have been inclined to conclude that the prudent and learned doctor, together with the whole of his establishment, had suddenly taken leave of their senses.

The doctor had divided his forces into two parties, taking charge of one himself, while Mr. Curtiss led the other, and thus they marched in a sort of irregular order.

Most of the boys had come to regard the affair as rather a good joke, as being something quite original and out of the ordinary; and their spirits rising to the occasion, a good deal of talking, laughter, and nonsense passed backwards and forwards among them, which Dr. Marsh did not try to suppress, but only to keep within limits.

But as the party drew near the Priory, the talk and laughter died out. The immediate object of the expedition now occupied the thoughts of all; and besides, many were still conscious, if they would have confessed it, of a slight feeling of awe, notwithstanding that all belief in any ghost had been

dispelled from their minds. The lonesomeness and melancholy weirdness of the spot impressed them in spite of themselves.

Dennis walked beside Dr. Marsh, and he now led the way to the point from which he thought the ghost could be best seen.

The boys pressed forward and peered through the ruined windows, and through broken gaps in the old wall of the chapel.

There it stood plainly before the eyes of all, as tall and as pale white as ever, the long white gown falling down behind, the arm uplifted,—just as like the spectre of an old monk as a column of moonlight could be.

Dr. Marsh stepped inside the chapel, followed by the rest in a confused body, and advanced to the other end; and presently all were standing with the moonlight falling upon them and flowing around them.

“There, boys; I don’t suppose that any of you have ever been brought to such close quarters with

a real genuine ghost before," said Dr. Marsh. "Hamlet speaks about ghosts revisiting the glimpses of the moon; but our ghost is the moon itself."


"In fact, sir, the whole thing turns out to be all moonshine," said Sam Demerrick.

"Exactly, as all such stories have done, or would, if they were properly looked into. And now form marching order again, and back to the house. You may all take an extra half-hour in bed to-morrow; and we'll have the breakfast that much later."

## CHAPTER IX.

MISS PENDRILL.

"A sweet old-fashioned garden, set  
With wall-flower, stock, and mignonette,  
And prim, sedate box border;  
Roses and lilies all a-blow,  
Pinks and carnations row by row,  
And all in quaint, trim order."

"ILLY, could you do something for me  
this afternoon, if you've no other  
engagement?"

It was Mrs. Hood who addressed her son as the two rose from their mid-day dinner, on the Saturday following the events of our last chapter.

"No, mamma, I have no engagement. We were to have had a cricket match with another school this afternoon, but it has fallen through. We shan't be able to have it this term now, as we break up on Friday. I can do anything you wish."

"I would like you to take Miss Pendrill one or two slips of that china-rose your papa got the other day from the rector's gardener. I believe it is a very fine variety, and I am sure Miss Pendrill would like to have a slip or two to try."

"I shall be glad to take them for you, mamma; and I may as well start at once."

Mrs. Hood brought the rose-cuttings, enclosed them in a piece of brown paper, and Willy taking them started on his errand.

It was a bright afternoon, and when Willy reached Miss Pendrill's cottage, which was about half an hour's walk from his own home, he found that lady in her front garden busy among her flower-beds.

Miss Pendrill was a lady of rather more than middle age, of medium height, and an upright, agile, and somewhat spare figure. She had a shrewd but kindly face, a small, well-shaped mouth, with a habit of screwing itself up when its possessor was more

intent in thought than ordinarily, an inquisitive nose, and bright light blue eyes.

Willy quietly let himself in at the garden gate, and advanced up the central walk. Miss Pendrill did not hear his approach until he was within a few yards of her. She was engrossed in her occupation, examining a young fuchsia plant with close scrutiny, and a double gold eye-glass.

"Hillo! is that you, Willy Hood? What an age it is since I've seen you!" she exclaimed when she caught sight of Willy. "You used once to come oftener to see me, sir; but I suppose you are getting too advanced in years to be bothered visiting old maids. How's your mother and father?"

Miss Pendrill was now shaking Willy warmly by the hand. The boy was a favourite of hers.

"What have you there?" she continued, nodding at the paper package.

"A few rose-cuttings of rather a rare kind, they say. It's a china-rose. Mamma thought you might like to have it," said Willie.

"Of course I shall. I'm always glad to try any new thing of that sort; it's a small excitement watching how it turns out,—a little thing makes an excitement in an old maid's life, you know. Thank your mother for me. How is your garden looking? Did that yellow carnation I gave her in the spring turn out anything well? Do you care to take a turn round here? My roses are looking not so badly this year."

Miss Pendrill took Willy all over the little garden, commenting at some length on such of her flower treasures as she prized most, and detailing the trouble and anxiety she had had in rearing certain of them. The garden was, in truth, worth a summer day's walk to see, so much had been made of the rather limited space; everything was so trim, and fresh, and bright; everything indicated so much taste, fancy, and skill. If people are born gardeners, Miss Pendrill was.

"Well, now, I daresay you have had about enough of my garden for the present. Come along in and

I'll see if I can reward you in some degree for your patience, Will," said Miss Pendrill, and she led the way into the house.

"It's no great trial of patience, Miss Pendrill. Your garden's worth coming a good distance to see any day at this season; and I never saw it looking better."

"It's very kind of you to say so; but you always were a polite boy, Willy."

I mean it, Miss Pendrill, though. I can't ever remember to have seen the garden so fresh and bright and pretty."

"Well, there may be a reason for that. But I'll perhaps tell you about that before you go. Now here's seed-cake, and Madeira cake, and mixed biscuits. Take which you choose—or, better, take some of each. The seed-cake's home-made, and perhaps none the worse for that, though I say it. And this is currant wine—home-made too, of course. I can't away with what they sell you at the grocers'. Precious little real fruit in them, I warrant."



Home-made or of foreign manufacture, all kinds of berry or currant wines were an abomination to Willy. Not that he cared for other kinds of wines either. When he got a hamper from home he usually had a bottle or two put up in it; but this was out of a heedful consideration for the tastes of his companions. He poured himself out a small quantity of Miss Pendrill's wine, and did his best to conceal the wry grimace which such beverages were always apt to bring into his face.

He cut himself a good slice of the seed-cake, partly with the idea of drawing his hostess's attention from the small quantity of wine he had taken, and partly for the cake's own sake, knowing pretty well, from frequent previous experience of Miss Pendrill's skill in this direction, that it was bound to be good.

"What do you think of the currant wine? I want your honest judgment upon it, Willy, as it is a new lot I made the other day."

Willy paused a minute, casting about for a reply.

His answer when it came was delivered in a tone of great gravity, and as though it were the outcome of the deepest conviction.

"I never tasted better currant wine in my life," he said.

He did not wish to offend his hostess, who had been kind and hospitable to him as far back as he could recollect, and he had still less desire to break the truth. He had managed pretty well, I think, to steer clear of both dangers; for his reply was literally true. He had never known much to choose between cordials of this description; and as the impression left by his words upon Miss Pendrill was a harmless enough one, I hope he will escape any severe judgment if a touch of hypocrisy on this occasion influenced his speech.

Miss Pendrill was quite satisfied with Willy's dictum upon her latest brewing; and Willy, desiring to turn the conversation from what he felt to be ticklish ground, hastened to say,—

"And the seed-cake's A 1, Miss Pendrill."

And Willy felt that here he could allow himself the fullest freedom of eulogium without a prick of conscience.

“Ah!” said Miss Pendrill complacently, “I’m glad you find it to your taste, Willy Hood. At a good, plain, honest cake, that a body may take a liberal slice of and get no harm, I’ll yield to few—at that, and I think I may add, rearing roses. I’ve brought up many a weakly and drooping bush that most people would have abandoned in despair; ay, and often made them as bright and brisk as their neighbours after all.”

Miss Pendrill spoke as if she had been talking of babies—quite as earnestly and almost as tenderly.

“Well, I never remember your roses prettier than they are this summer, Miss Pendrill, as I told you before,” said Willy.

“Perhaps you’re right; and perhaps others ought to come in for a share of the credit besides myself. And that reminds me that I said I might tell you something before you left. It’s rather a curious

little story, at least it has struck me so. Have you time to listen to it? or do you think it would interest you? I can't tell it just in a minute, for I must always tell a thing in my own way, as you know. But I shall try and make it as short as I can, if you care to hear it."

"Of course I do, when you raise a fellow's curiosity in that way, Miss Pendrill; and if the matter has interested you, I don't see why it mayn't interest me."

"That doesn't quite follow, though you are a thoughtful sort of laddie too. But you shall have it, and judge for yourself. You're not in any particular haste to get home?"

"I've nothing to do between this and tea-time—six o'clock. If I'm home then it's time enough."

"Telling you what I am going to, reminds me again, sir, of what a space it is since you were here last; not since anything of what I am to relate happened. When you were a little boy you used to be back and forwards every few weeks. Well,

never mind. I suppose it's only the nature of things, and what an old woman must look for. Another year or so, and I expect you'll give up coming altogether—having so many other interests.”


“No, no, I'll never do that, you'll see, Miss Pendrill. I haven't been to see you very often lately, I admit, but you see I've cricket matches nearly every Saturday in the summer now. I've been in the first eleven at school for the last year, and so I've more matches, of course; and it's only on Saturdays that I could very well come over, you know.”

“Well, that certainly is a reasonable excuse, I daresay, Willy. I don't expect you or any boy to give up your sports to come and see an old woman who's got nothing to show but a bit of a garden, and nothing to treat him to but seed-cake and currant-wine. But now to my story.”

## CHAPTER X.

MISS PENDRILL LOQUITUR.

“The little acts  
Of—shall we call it?—minor heroism,  
Untrumpeted, unrecognized, that make  
This life, for most a toilsome path to tread,  
A little easier for you and me,  
And many a sadder and more patient heart.”

“OU know that I have a boy to help me  
in the garden for an hour or so every  
day during spring and summer ; and I  
think you know also that I have sometimes had a  
good deal of trouble with my boys. Perhaps I am  
rather hard to please, but my young gardeners have  
seldom come up to my idea of what they might be  
with a little more pains and attention on their part.  
And I consider that I pay them fairly enough too, for  
all the time I ask from them—five shillings a week.

"But now I have got the best garden-help I have ever had, by far. When my last left me, and I was unsuccessful in hearing of another for some weeks, I put an advertisement in the *Morning News*, which I have seldom done.

"I had some six or seven applications for the place, and among them one boy who presented in every way a marked contrast to the rest. His appearance, speech, and general manner all told that he was much above the rank of boys who generally undertake the sort of work I required. In fact, it was easy to discover, after a little conversation with him, that he was well educated and had been gently reared.

"I was not a little puzzled at this, as you may understand. I was decidedly taken with the boy, but, at the same time, I had great doubts whether he was at all the sort of person I wanted. I thought at first that he had perhaps mistaken the nature of the situation he was applying for, but I soon discovered that he quite understood the kind

of work to be done. The fact of his being of an education and rearing so much above that of garden-boys by no means proved that he was the best qualified for my requirements. His hands did not look as if they had been accustomed to frequent manual work. They were much like your own in regard to signs of wear and weather.

“Still, as I say, I was taken with the boy, and pleased, moreover, at the earnest desire he seemed to have that I should give him a trial. He didn’t talk very much, indeed, either about himself or anything else; but still it was quite evident that he was very anxious that I should engage him.

“I asked him if he knew anything of gardening, and he said no. This was not in his favour exactly; but then I did not forget that I had frequently had boys who professed to know something of garden-work, and the amount of whose knowledge proved to be worth next to nothing. I was quite prepared to teach my young gardeners their duties, if they were only willing to pay attention and take some



trouble to learn; and my present applicant said, modestly enough, that he thought he should not be long in picking up his duties, if I didn't think it too much trouble to teach. I liked this way of putting the matter, and was inclined to augur well from it.

"Not to dwell any longer on this part of my story, I resolved, after a little deliberation, to give the boy a trial, and he came to me on the next day. I have had no cause to regret my decision. He has given me satisfaction in every way.

"As you may suppose, I was a little more interested and curious about my new boy than about any I had ever previously had. Why he was undertaking his present work, altogether unlike, as I felt sure it was, anything he had previously been accustomed to, did not cease to puzzle me, and not seldom gave me matter for thought after my young gardener had left me in the evenings.

"For some time the boy was silent and uncommunicative about himself and his affairs, and I was careful not to press him too closely on the subject.

I was really curious to know something more about his history, but I felt that in order to do so I must be cautious how I went to work. By too abrupt or inquisitive questioning I should only, in all probability, have made him shyer and more on his guard, and perhaps hurt his feelings besides, which I had no desire whatever to do.

“So I was very guarded and careful in my questions and remarks, and by-and-by he grew more confidential and communicative. Meanwhile he was all that I could have hoped for, in regard to his duties,—attentive, painstaking, anxious to please me, and, in addition, very quick to pick up instruction, hints, and suggestions. This last point, of course, was one in which his better education materially assisted him.

“I liked the boy, and I think he has come to like and trust me. As he began to see that I was not merely inquisitive in regard to him, but interested in him, he let me into a little more of his history, until one afternoon he told me it all.

“He is Irish by birth and parentage, as I had easily guessed from his speech on our first interview. About a year ago his father left a situation in a commercial house in the east of Ireland to enter a bank in Porthaven. He made the change partly because it was a more lucrative situation that he was coming to, and partly for the sake of his daughter’s health. She has been an invalid for some two years, and our climate here is brighter and sunnier for her than her former home, which was rather a bleak and exposed part of the Irish coast.

“Very shortly after the arrival of the family in Porthaven the father died of a sudden illness. The sole means which the mother now had for the maintenance of her two children and herself arose from a small life annuity. This no more than sufficed, with good management, for the decent support of the little household. The boy’s education had yet to be completed. The mother wished to give him as good an education as possible before

he began business life, and it was necessary to this end that he should have at least a year more of good schooling.

“The invalid girl would have been the better for many little things, beneficial and grateful to one in her delicate health, both in the way of strengthening medicines, wine, and more dainty kinds of food; but the widow found that she had scant margin left from her ordinary household expenses for the supply of these.

“Well, it occurred to the boy that he might find some light employment after school-hours by which he might add a trifle to his mother’s resources, and afford the means of procuring such little extras as were recommended by the doctors for his sister. He wanted something that would occupy the time between afternoon school and the evening meal at home; for after that he had to begin the preparation of his school-work.

“At first he thought of trying to get some kind of head-work, perhaps the superintendence of some

younger boy's class-work. Then he saw my advertisement, and it struck him that light manual labour would be better for him than brain-work; for he was working hard at school, seeing that his time there was soon to draw to a close, and found his class-studies almost enough. He made up his mind to apply for the place. He made known his idea to his mother, and she, after a little reflection, made no objections. She agreed with her son in thinking that hand-work would be better for him than any kind of mental occupation; and though the idea of his becoming a garden-help, even for a time, came, of course, a little strange to her, she overcame the feeling, and recognized the real wisdom that guided her son in his decision.

"They told the invalid girl, too, and she was rather more slow to become reconciled to the idea, as was perhaps natural; for whatever sacrifice or self-denial was involved in her brother's action was being made for her, and this thought disturbed her a little. But she did not long insist on her objec-

tions against the wishes and arguments of her mother and brother.

“And now that is almost all I have to tell, I think. Most of what I have told you I learned, as I said, from the boy himself, but one or two of the facts I have gathered since I have become acquainted with the rest of the family, as I did some time ago. The boy’s history, as he narrated it to me, of course, increased my interest in him, and I hinted to him that I should like to know his mother and sister. A day or two after he offered to introduce me to them, and that same afternoon I walked home with him.

“I have visited the family several times since that, and may now fairly call myself a friend. I need hardly say that the boy stands on quite a different relation to me from any of my previous garden-helps. He is quite a companion to me, and, being a well-read and well-informed youngster for his years, with a natural love of books, and no small gift for remembering what he reads, he is really

good company, to one like me at any rate, whose circle of acquaintances is not large.

“He is a bright, cheerful-hearted fellow, generally speaking, though sometimes he is grave and thoughtful enough too, for which, I daresay, he has reasons; and he has, besides, a vein of quiet fun, which reveals itself even in his sober moods. I have reason to think that the weekly sum he receives from me has been of great service in procuring little luxuries for the sister; for though it is not a large amount, it is sufficient to do a good deal in this way with clever management. The deep family attachment which exists in the little household is, I assure you, a pleasant thing to witness.”

Willy had listened to Miss Pendrill throughout with an attention and interest that deepened as she went on. Long before she had concluded, a suspicion had arisen in his mind which became at length almost conviction.

“What school does he go to, Miss Pendrill, do you know?”

"I really do not. It never occurred to me to ask him. I know that it is considered a good one, and that it is pretty expensive. His mother wished him to go to the best possible, she told me, as his time was so short; and I daresay it has only been with some pressure that she has been able to spare the necessary money. She may have mentioned the school to me, or the boy may have done so; but if they did, I have forgotten it. It was not a point, of course, that was likely to particularly catch my attention, though, no doubt, a natural thing for you to ask and to be curious to know.

"He has worked very hard at school, I fancy, and the last week or so he has been boarding at the school, in order to stick more closely to his books, preparatory to the examinations; so he has not been here during that time. He asked me if I could spare him, and, of course, I said I could; but he came over this afternoon to give me a few hours' help in the garden, though he does not come on Saturdays usually. On every fine Saturday after-



noon he and his mother take Annie, the daughter, out to some sunny spot along the shore somewhere, and spend a few hours in the open air, which, no doubt, does the girl much good."

"And the boy's name, Miss Pendrill? You have never mentioned that," said Willy.

"Have I not? His name is Kavanagh—Dennis Kavanagh."

Of course it was. Willy did not need to be told, though he had asked.

"Quite an Irish-sounding name, you see."

"Yes," replied Willy, in a rather absent way, for he hardly heard Miss Pendrill's last remark.

For a few moments he was deep in thought. Miss Pendrill's story was indeed a revelation, and calculated, considering all the past circumstances of Dennis Kavanagh's life at Ashcombe House, to cause a boy of even a less reflective and old-fashioned turn than Willy some thought and mental exercise.

"He's been here this afternoon, you say, Miss Pendrill?" he at length asked slowly.

"Yes; since shortly after dinner. When you arrived I had just left him in the back garden. He was finishing clipping the box border. He has probably gone now, as he had not much more to do, and was to leave directly he had finished. But it's just possible that he may be still in the garden. He's a most conscientious and thoughtful young man, and often finds some little bit of extra work to do about the place, which is quite gratuitous on his part. He is very neat with his hands at odd jobs of carpentering. Would you like to see him?"

Willy paused for a moment; but, whatever he might have wished, he could not well do anything but reply in the affirmative.

"Yes, I shouldn't mind," he answered.

"Well, we can pass through the back garden on your way out, and if he is still there you can see him; if not, there's no harm done. Perhaps you may have some other opportunity of meeting him here; he will very likely be with me through his holidays at least. I should rather like you to see him."

Miss Pendrill now rose from her seat, and Willy and she passed through to the back of the house, and so out into the rear garden.

“Yes, there he is,” said Miss Pendrill. “He has finished the box border, but he has found out that loose paling in the fence, and is setting it to rights. Did I not tell you he was a gem of a boy—or rather a ‘jewel,’ as his own countrymen would say?”

At the farther end of the garden a boy was engaged in nailing a paling in the fence that had got loosened from its place; his back was turned to Miss Pendrill and Willy.

“You will notice that he is wearing a pretty old and worn coat,” said Miss Pendrill; “but that is not his regular one. He changes that before he begins his garden-work. He is obliged to be careful about such things; he hasn’t the run of a tailor, like yourself, Master Willy. But, poor laddie, he’ll maybe come along in the world well enough yet—at least, he deserves to. But come and we’ll have a word with him. He may be a little shy at suddenly being

introduced to a stranger of his own age ; but we must risk that."

Miss Pendrill advanced to where Kavanagh was busy at his work, followed by Willy. When the two were close to Dennis, the latter turned. A look compounded of a good deal of surprise and some embarrassment, verging upon confusion, came into his face as his eyes lit upon Willy. Miss Pendrill at once noticed the look, and was sufficiently puzzled.

Willy at once determined to put an end to what looked as if it might be a perplexing situation. He advanced, and held out his hand to Dennis, who took it without speaking.

"You're surprised to see me here, I daresay, Kavanagh ; but Miss Pendrill and I are old friends, though I haven't been to visit her very often lately."

"So, what do you mean by this, Master Willy Hood ? Why on earth did you not say that you knew Dennis ? Do you mean to say you have been allowing me to tell you all I did, knowing it the

whole time?" said Miss Pendrill, considerably more perplexed than ever.

"No, no, Miss Pendrill, not that. I suspected before you had done who it was you were talking about, but I knew nothing of the rest, really."

"Then why didn't you say you knew whom I meant?"

"I don't know; but there's no harm done. For one thing, I didn't want to interrupt you before you had finished."

"Always a model of manners, Willy Hood. But you have certainly a gift of holding your tongue, for a boy. But now, pray, how do Dennis and you come to be acquainted?"

"Why, easily enough, Miss Pendrill; we go to the same school." And here a smile overspread Willy's face, and a close observer would have seen Dennis's lips also turn upwards and his eyes twinkle. The situation had, in truth, a touch of humour.

"Do you indeed! And all this coming out only now." Miss Pendrill herself was now quite alive to

the humorsome side of the scene, and the expression on her features was a curious mixture of appreciation of this and an affectation of gravity.

"Well, if I hadn't been pretty dull, or engrossed in my own talk, it might perhaps have suggested itself to me that possibly the school Dennis attends was Ashcombe House, seeing that that has the reputation of being one of the first in the countryside. And now I fancy that either you or your mother, Dennis, must have once mentioned that Ashcombe House was your school."

"I may have done so, Miss Pendrill, but I can't remember; or my mother may," said Dennis.

"Well, it's of no consequence. And so you two are school-companions. I hope you're good friends."

"We're not the reverse anyway, Miss Pendrill," Willy hastened to reply. "We haven't had many opportunities of meeting away from school, you see; but perhaps we'll be more intimate from this time. Both of us knowing you will be an interest between us, as it were."

"That's very polite of you to say so, and I hope it will be the case. But, Dennis, it's full time you were away now. I see you've quite finished that fence. Thank you very much. Get on your other coat now and be off; I don't want your mother to think that I'm keeping you beyond your proper time."

"No fear of that, Miss Pendrill," said Dennis.

"Our road home lies the same way for a bit, Dennis; shall we go together?" said Willy.

"I shall be very glad," Dennis answered; and the two boys, having bade Miss Pendrill good-bye, started. Miss Pendrill stood watching them at her garden gate, until a turn in the road hid them from sight.

"I should like to see these two boys become firm friends," she said to herself. "They're good little fellows, as boys go, both of them."

For a few minutes the two boys walked along together almost in silence. Willy had something in his thoughts to say, and he was considering how best to put it.

"Of course you've guessed, Kavanagh, that Miss Pendrill has told me all about you and your people. Do you mind?"

"No. Miss Pendrill has been too kind and taken too much interest in me that I should mind her doing that. Perhaps I shouldn't have cared about her telling everybody; but I'm sure she'll not do that. Your people are among her most intimate friends, I understand, and I don't the least mind that you should know."

"That's all right then. I suppose I may call you Dennis now?"

"To be sure."

"And you'll call me Willy or Will, eh?"

"Very well."

There was another short pause, which Willy was again the first to break, saying, with a slightly hesitating manner,—

"You remember that time Dick Barclay challenged you to fight, Dennis?"

"Yes, I do; and the recollection isn't a very



pleasant one, as you may suppose," said Dennis, smiling a little. He could smile now over the matter—in talking to Willy, at any rate.

"I daresay not. Well, I want to ask your pardon for my part in that affair. To tell you the truth, I didn't think you showed much pluck at the time. I see now that I was quite mistaken. What you did about the Clyffe Priory business is quite enough to prove that you've as much or more than any of the fellows. But if that hadn't happened at all, I would have no right now to think as I once, together with the other chaps, thought of you. There are different sorts of courage, I reckon; but now I know that you've got more than one sort."

"I don't pretend to have more than other fellows, of any kind, Willy, I assure you; but can you guess now at all why I was unwilling to fight Barclay that day?"

"No, I can't say I can."

"Well, you see, if I had fought, I should have run a good chance of being knocked about a bit.

Barclay is a strong fellow, as you know. Now, I shouldn't have much minded that for myself, but suppose I had got a black eye or a scarred lip, how could I have shown myself to Miss Pendrill? You must know how nice and particular she is about everything—likes everything about her to be as trim and tidy as it is possible to be. Why, she would have been so shocked that my character might have been tremendously damaged in her sight. Now, I had only been a short time with her then, and, of course, I was anxious to stand well with her. I had others to consider in the matter besides myself—in fact, others chiefly. And that is the reason I refused Barclay's challenge. I don't really think I was afraid of the knocking about I might get, though I think he would as likely as not have beaten me."

"I'm sure you weren't, Dennis, and that clears up the whole matter now. I'm glad you've told me this. *I was* a little puzzled about it, but now I see it all as plain as day, and I don't see how you could have

done anything else than what you did. For you to have shown yourself at Miss Pendrill's with a black eye, or a swollen face, or anything like that, and had to tell her the real cause of it, might have done for you in her sight. I know her well enough to feel pretty sure of that. We'll have to say good-bye now. I go along Queen Street. But I just want to ask you something. Would you come to see me at my house now and again during the holidays—come and spend the day with me, I mean? I should be very glad if you would."

"I shall be very happy," said Dennis.

"Well, then, we'll fix some day early in the holidays at school next week. You're to stay at school all next week, I think?"

"Yes; till we break up on Friday. I go home for the Saturday and Sunday."

"Well, we'll settle a day, and I'll come for you."

"Oh, you needn't mind doing that."

"I will for the first day, at any rate, as you will then be able to find our house all the easier after-

wards. You may not know our part of the suburbs very well, and I hope to see you pretty often from this time. My father has a yacht during the summer, and I hope we shall have a good many jolly sails together in it with him. Good-bye till Monday."

And the two boys shook hands warmly, and parted.

## CHAPTER XL

### MAKING AMENDS.

'Often quick and hasty  
To form conclusions, but as readily  
Admitting error and regret, and quick  
To make all reparation possible.'



WELL, it's a queer sort of a yarn, no doubt about that." Harry Wright was the speaker.

Willy Hood had just finished telling the whole story he had learned a couple of days back from Miss Pendrill to Harry, Arnold, and Sam.

"It's what the novel-writers call a *dénouement*—a genuine *dénouement*," said Sam.

"Yes; but don't you think it was awfully good of him, the whole thing?" said Willy.

"Yes, I do—jolly good. It's odd a little, perhaps,

but it's good. I'm ready, for one, to stick to that," said Sam.

"So will I. It was a kind of thing lots of fellows wouldn't have done if they had thought of it, and many wouldn't have thought of it," said Arnold.

'You see, we've been out all along about Kavanagh," Willy resumed. "We thought him little more than a coward in that affair with Dick Barclay,—and perhaps it looked rather like it. Well, I've explained all that; and, besides, we've the Priory business if we want any more proof that we were mistaken on that point. Then we made fun and game of him in various ways when he first came here, and let the youngsters worry and plague him no end, and put them up to it sometimes, I suspect."

"Hold hard, Will! You ought not to include yourself in that last charge. I don't think you had much hand in any of that," said Harry.

"Well, I didn't do anything to try and prevent it anyway, and I sometimes joined in the laugh at

him as well as the rest. I don't think any of us can excuse ourselves altogether."

"But some have had more to do with it than others," said Sam—"myself, for instance. You've to blame yourself less than any one, Willy. We're all ready to say that. I don't want to shirk my part in the business, though I'm sorry for it."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Sam," said Willy; "but, anyway, we've been all more or less mistaken about Kavanagh, and all more or less to blame. We've acted awfully shabbily to him. His life here must have been pretty dull and miserable, for he's as much as been in Coventry most of the time since we left off noticing him by tricks and humbugging; for nobody spoke to him except one or two of the youngsters, until the Priory ghost affair. Well, it's pretty clear, isn't it, that we owe him some amends?"

"Yes, that's plain enough," said Harry.

"Now, of course, you'll all be good friends with him till we break up."

"Yes; but that isn't much," said Sam.

"I know it isn't; but it will at least show him that our feelings are altogether changed towards him, and that will be something; and I'm sure he'll take it as we intend. Then it's pretty certain he's coming back after the holidays for at any rate six months longer, and we can continue to be friends with him then, and get him to join in all our games and whatever fun's going. I propose, for one thing, that we make him an honorary member of the cricket club, as it were—admit him without asking him for any entrance or subscription money."

"But do you think he'll agree to that?" said Arnold. "I should think he would be a proud enough sort of fellow about a thing like that."

"I daresay; but I think I could manage that if you agreed to leave it to me. I know he couldn't well afford at present to pay what we each do to the club, though, no doubt, he would like a game now and then as well as any of us; it mightn't be often that he could spare the time for a regular match."

"We'll agree to leave that to you, then, Will, and



if you manage it all right, next term we'll see about electing him a right royal honorary member of the Ashcombe House cricket club, with all the proper forms and ceremonies."

"Dennis Kavanagh, R.R.H.M.A.H.C.C., sounds pretty imposing, don't it?" said Sam. "We'll have a sort of grand Masonic installation, with a badge for him, and all that sort of thing. It's the first time we shall have had such a thing as an honorary member of the club, so we ought to commemorate the occasion properly."

"Don't make nonsense of it now, Sam," said Willy, a little seriously, doubtful of Sam's intention.

"I'm not, Willy, honour bright. I meant it."

"All right. Well, then, that's about all we can do meanwhile. I'm going to have Dennis with me at home for a day now and again during the holidays, and I hope to see one or other of you fellows sometimes too. I'm going to tell what I have been telling you about Dennis to the doctor before we break up. I want him to know it. I hope he'll get one

or two good prizes. I think he will, and I'm sure he deserves it, and none of us will grudge him them."

"You dear old boy," said Sam, placing his arm caressingly upon Willy's shoulders, "have you got any *vitium*, as the old Latins call it, about you at all, at all?"

"Now, no nonsense, Sam, please," answered Willy laughing.

"Well, we all thought once there was some sort of mystery or other about Kavanagh," said Arnold.

"Especially you, Arnold. It was you, if my memory betrays me not, who went in particularly for the mystery notion—been reading some complicated kind of romance at the time, I expect, and had your imagination running in that direction," said Sam.

"Perhaps you're right; I don't mean about the romance reading—I don't remember that I was doing any such thing then—but about the other matter. But anyway it's all cleared up now."

"And has turned out to be nothing very mysteri-

ous after all, and nothing to be ashamed of either, but just the other way," said Willy.

Just then the school bell rang for tea, which brought the conversation to a close.

During that week Dennis was able to realize what a different thing his school-life at Ashcombe House might be from what it had been.

Harry, Arnold, and Sam, together with a number of others, comprising especially the boys of his own class, began to show in a variety of ways that they wished him to forget all that was past, and that quite a different condition of things should exist between them and him for the future.

Dennis was very ready to meet his school-fellows half way. Pride of a certain kind he had, as the reader by this time may have gathered; but it was not of a kind that prevented him from receiving his schoolmates' advances in the right spirit, frankly and freely, as they were made. His pride was not of an obstinate, sulky, or suspicious sort. He believed that the boys meant all they were now

saying—that they really wished to be friendly with him, and regretted much, if not all, that was past—and he accepted their words and actions without hesitation and without reserve.

The boys made their various efforts to put Dennis at his ease, and render the short time that remained till the holidays as pleasant as possible to him, in a fashion that fully satisfied even Willy Hood. Of course the whole story about Dennis which Willy had told his three classmates was by them soon circulated throughout the whole school, and the opinion in regard to it was unanimous. On some it made a deeper impression than upon others, according to age and temperament; but the difference of feeling with which one received it from another was only one of degree, not of kind. In the minds of all, the story, taken in conjunction with his action in the matter of the Priory spectre, an event of only a day or two before, set Dennis in a more or less heroic light.

There was no boy in the school so young, or

so wrong-headed, or so dull-hearted, as not to be able to estimate at something like their proper value the new facts that had suddenly been revealed regarding Dennis, his history and his character. All felt and were ready to acknowledge that their opinion of him had, up to this, been in all respects a mistaken one.

Dennis's heart warmed at the frank avowal that was being made on all hands by his school-fellows that they had wrongly and hardly judged him, and that they were sorry for the past.

It was done often in a rough enough fashion, awkward, altogether boyish, and sometimes even ludicrous in its eager abruptness; but there was little possibility of mistaking the genuineness of intention, and it gladdened and lightened Dennis's spirit wonderfully.

After all, the term, by finishing thus, would leave a cheerful enough impression with him, and everything augured well for the next.

Two days after the conversation chronicled in

the beginning of this chapter, on the Wednesday evening, Sam Demerrick, accompanied by Harry, Willy, Arnold, Dick Barclay, and Jack Dent, came to Dennis.

"Dennis," began Sam, "I want you to listen to a poem I've just written, in which I have taken the liberty to make you the subject. I once wrote some lines upon the same topic, which you may remember, but which I hope you don't, or that you will forget now anyway. Well, I thought it was only fair that I should try something in a slightly different style. Do you mind my reading them to you?"

"Not a bit, if you wish to. Fire away," Dennis replied, feeling, perhaps, just a trifle embarrassed, but laughing.

"This is by way of being what the old Latins called a *palinodia*. Horace has one, you know—Ode Sixteen, Book First—a fact I thought I'd just notice in my lines, though it was a job to get a right rhyme, and I fancy I've only managed it middling after all. But here goes." And Sam began, while the

others sat round and listened without interruption. The verses were new to them all as well as to Dennis, with the exception of Willy, to whom Sam had first submitted them for approval.

#### A PALINODIA, OR RECANTATION.

“ Which I beg to state here, that all may know it,  
That whereas the present jingling poet  
Wrote certain lines on one Dennis K—,  
He now would simply wish to say  
That said poem had all that was false and absurd in it,  
And of sense or reason not one word in it ;  
The which said poet, mistaken, retracts,  
In consideration of truth and facts ;  
And I call this rhyme, this doggerel ode here,  
What Horace would style it—a *palinodia*.

“ To foolish flattery I hope  
The heaven-born muse may never stoop ;  
But this I state is literal true,  
That Denny’s a jewel through and through,  
And whatever name you can find to call that  
Signifying good fellow, brick, and all that ;  
True grit, as the Yanks say, out and out,  
And this stands proved beyond a doubt.

“ Then here’s to the lad who, with never a boast,  
So quietly settled the Priory ghost,  
Showed up the mystery clear as day,  
And laid the spectre for ever and aye ;  
Who did one or two other things which it’s clear  
It isn’t the place to specify here,

But which all have thought, and many said,  
Do credit alike to his heart and head ;  
And his case I reckon 's an instance quite  
That our copy-book mottoes are mostly right,—  
' To hasty conclusions we never should jump,'  
For Dennis turns out a regular trump."

"Well done, old man!" exclaimed Dick Barclay, when Sam had finished, clapping him on the back. "Them's my sentiments too, only put more poetical than I could do it."

"How do you like them, Den?" said Sam.

"First-rate; just too complimentary, that's all. But that's what's called poetical license, I suppose."

"Not a bit. It's truth."

"I say, Sam," said Jack Dent, "why have you never written a bit of poetry for breaking-up days, and recited it yourself? Mergo would like it, and it would show the public what Ashcombe House can do in the poetical line."

Jack spoke in all seriousness. Sam's knack at rhymes had always impressed him with a simple and genuine admiration.

"Tuts, Jack; are you in earnest or mildly chaffing



me?—which I don't think lies much in your line. Do you imagine that because I can jingle a few rhymes together I could make a poem to recite? Why, don't you know the sort of thing that's wanted at breaking-up days?—'My name is Norval,' and 'On Linden, when the sun was low,' and 'Lars Porsena of Clusium,' and all the rest of them. That's poetry, sir."

"I don't mean that you should do anything of that kind exactly, but something comic, you know; that's your style. I think you could do that. Something like the 'Little Vulgar Boy,' or 'Ben Battle,' you know."

"Not within a thousand miles of them could I come, my dear Jack, though I feel flattered by your opinion of my poetical powers. No; I daresay Sam Demerriek is a fool in a number of ways, but he isn't such a fool as to think himself a poet, or to try ever to be one either."

"I was with Mergo in his study for a short time this morning," said Harry Wright. "I was helping him to arrange the class-lists of the lower school."

"And of course he let you into one or two secrets about the upper school too—how some of the prizes were going, &c. That's one of the privileges that fall to a captain," said Sam.

"He didn't tell me much about how the fourth and third forms stand. It wouldn't have been quite the thing; but he dropped one or two hints of how several of the prizes have gone, especially those that didn't concern myself."

"Oh, but you feel pretty safe for being captain still; we all know that," said Willy. "Did you see any of the prizes, Harry?"

"Yes, some. But I'm not going to say anything about them; it would be breaking confidences, you know, and not the square thing; except just this,—the prize for first in mathematics is among the very best—a jolly book. I haven't got it; I never expected to; and the winner isn't far off."

All knew that Harry meant Dennis, for it was generally known among the older boys that he stood

the best chance of being first in the school in mathematics.

That same evening Willy Hood sought Dr. Marsh in his study, and was alone with him for a considerable time. The result of that interview was that on the afternoon of the next day, when the school was dismissed, the doctor walked over to Porthaven and called on Mrs. Kavanagh.

After a few minutes of general conversation with her—they had met but once before, on the occasion of Dennis entering Ashcombe House school—the doctor came to the direct object of his visit.

“When you first came to me about your son entering my school, Mrs. Kavanagh, I remember you said that he would just be a year with me, and that he would then like to get some sort of situation—mercantile or otherwise. I suppose I am correct in inferring that it is necessary to you in a monetary point of view that Dennis should soon be doing for himself. I trust I am not intrusive or officious in saying this.

“I have been very well pleased with Dennis since he has been under my charge, both with his progress in his work and with his general conduct. I feel that I could trust him; and what I want to say is, to come at once to the point, that I am willing to engage him as my youngest assistant master at the end of six months. At that time my first assistant, Mr. Hirst, leaves me to open a school of his own; Mr. Curtiss, the present second master, will take his place, and the place of the second master will then be vacant.

“In six months’ time Dennis will be old enough for the situation. He will be then sixteen, I believe—rather younger, indeed, than any of my masters have hitherto been, but old enough for my little boys; and he looks, besides, rather older than his years.

“I do not know, of course, whether this will suit either your son or yourself. Perhaps you may have other plans in view, or your son may have decided on engaging in mercantile pursuits, but I thought I would just mention it to you. The salary I would

allow Dennis would be fifty pounds for the first year, with an increase the next, which would be a matter of future arrangement.

“ You will understand, Mrs. Kavanagh, that school teaching in general is not a profession at which large fortunes are made; but we mustn’t all look for large fortunes. If your son sticks steadily to his work, gets to like it tolerably and to take an interest in it, I can promise, with the amount of ability he possesses, that he will in time come to derive a fairly good income from it. The life of a school-master has its drawbacks, its cares, and its worries, plenty of them; but speaking from a pretty long personal experience now, I can say that it offers as fair opportunities for an honourable and happy career as most other professions.

“ If you are prepared to give me an answer on this subject, so far as you yourself are concerned, now, well and good; if not, perhaps you will be kind enough to let me know in the course of a few days, and your son’s decision at the same time.”

"Your proposal, sir, is so unexpected," Mrs. Kavanagh replied, "that I am not quite ready to answer even for myself; though I must at once thank you very much for your kindness and thoughtfulness. I think I should like Dennis to accept the situation, but I should wish to leave it almost entirely to himself. I can trust him, sir, to decide aright in the matter; for he is not apt naturally to decide hastily or unreasonably. I don't think, so far as I have ever heard him say anything on the subject at least, that he has yet fixed on any special line of business that he would like to pursue. What you have just said inclines me to advise him to do as you suggest; but I shall be able to let you know in a few days, directly the matter has been settled between us. Dennis will be home on Friday. I shall write you, sir, sometime during next week."

"That will do very well. If your son does not see his way to enter upon the career of a school-master, I shall have to look about me for a new

junior assistant during the vacation ; but I am in hopes that he may decide in favour of my proposal."

"Allow me again to thank you, Dr. Marsh, for your kindness," said Mrs. Kavanagh, as she conducted her visitor to the door.

She returned to the sitting-room, full of thought, to discuss the doctor's visit with Annie, who had been, of course, present during the whole time, a silent but deeply interested listener.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE DEAN'S SPEECH.

"Who keeps not in his memory green  
His school-days....

The old companionships, the faithful chums,  
The sports that every day fresh pleasure brought,  
Even the tasks, sad source of many woes,  
The wild exultant joys of breaking up,  
The long delights of summer holidays?"



T was the afternoon of Friday; the large school-room at Ashcombe House was about as full as it could comfortably hold of people. The visitors, friends of Dr. Marsh or of the boys, sat in front, immediately before a raised platform carpeted with green baize and backed by a baize screen. The boys occupied rows of forms behind. They were, of course, in their bravest attire: their "Sunday-go-to-meeting," as some would rather irreverently have put it; their "war-paint,"



as others of the older boys phrased it. The majority of the latter carried their finery with a very considerable amount of confidence and *aplomb*; but the younger boys, as a rule, looked but half comfortable and easy in body or mind. It would take a year or two yet before they achieved the repose and happy self-possession, which to their eyes at least seemed consummate, of their fourth form school-fellows. Their collars, starched to a hardly endurable degree of stiffness, chafed their throats terribly. Their neckties or scarfs had been arranged by themselves with such mathematical precision, that they dreaded every moment lest a turn of the head would set them all askew, with the result of rendering their wearers ridiculous in the eyes of the assembled audience. Such of the youngsters as had gloves feared to put them on; for their hands were hot and perspiring, and they felt that their gloves would to a certainty be too small, and ignominiously betray them.

These, and several other causes of an analogous

kind, tended to keep the youngsters abnormally quiet and subdued during the opening part of the proceedings, and until their attention became diverted from the consideration of their own personal appearance by other and deeper interests.

First came the reading of the class-lists by the doctor, with some comment upon the work of his pupils during the term. Then followed the recitations, beginning with the younger boys.

A very small boy, Jack Trickett, the smallest in the school in fact, chosen partly, perhaps, on that account, conspicuous by a large bright pink necktie, upon which all eyes immediately became focussed, so that the wearer himself stood a chance of being merged and lost to sight altogether in the glory of the gay ribbon, mounted the platform and delivered, "The boy stood on the burning deck." Jack had an astonishingly clear and ringing voice, and a remarkable amount of confidence for one of his age in things of this kind. His power of lung, so startlingly out of all proportion to his physique

generally, completed what the pink necktie had begun. His bodily presence was clean obliterated from the eyes of the guests, while his voice rang like a bell in their ears.

He retired to his seat amid the unanimous applause of his schoolmates, and the approving smiles of the ladies and gentlemen, who nevertheless felt a good deal relieved that he was done.

Jack was followed by Tom Armstrong, a second form boy, who recited Longfellow's ever-popular, pretty, and slightly incomprehensible ballad, "Excelsior." Tom did not understand above a tenth part of what it all meant, but as he interpreted the poem literally, as an incident that had actually occurred, it came to much the same thing; and it was considered that he rendered the lines with much feeling and expression, clearly indicating a degree of intelligence remarkable for his years.

It is not my intention to describe in detail the programme of the recitations. To say the truth, there was little that was novel in the entertainment

provided by Dr. Marsh for his visitors—as how should there be? The number of these speech-days which he had had at his school was greater than he could recollect, and he had long ago exhausted all that British literature yields of pieces adapted to juvenile elocutionists.

Like most of his fellow-dominies throughout the land, he had taught the same stock-pieces for exhibition-days until he himself could have repeated them all backwards, or nearly so. The range of English literature is a wide one, but the number of poetical compositions suitable for young histrionics is, after all, limited, if at least the various school manuals of extracts are a true witness. And long may the old, well-worn favourites hold their own at our school speech-days.

And so the present programme at Ashcombe House included many familiar friends. The text-books which Dr. Marsh had been accustomed chiefly to rely upon were the old Charter House poetry book, and the Enfield Speaker, though he frequently

drew upon other sources. These two manuals, I am pretty sure, he could have said off from memory from end to end.

There were to-day, Mark Antony over the dead body of Cæsar,—“Friends, countrymen, and brothers, lend me your ears,” &c.; and Cato’s Soliloquy on Death; and Orlando and Adam, from “As You Like It.” There was Brutus and Cassius; not, I think, “My name is Norval”—that was going a little out of date at this time. And from more recent authors, besides the two pieces already mentioned, “The boy stood on the burning deck,” and “Excelsior,” there were, “The king has come to marshal us,” and, “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” There was also a Latin recitation of a speech from Cicero.

Perhaps the most novel item in the programme, and that which was received with as much favour as any, was a scene from the “Pickwick Papers,” arranged by Dr. Marsh, and introduced by way of supplying the humorous element in the proceedings.

It was performed by boys of the fourth form, and went off with great effect—a good deal to Dr. Marsh's relief and satisfaction, for it was the most ambitious thing he had hitherto attempted in this way.

Sam Demerrick carried off the first honours for the manner in which he impersonated the imperturbable Sam Weller, the various features of whose character he portrayed with much gusto and drollery.

Arnold Maurice likewise achieved distinction for his exhibition of Mr. Winkle, into whose manner of speech he had taken the liberty of introducing a slight stutter, which, though there is no warrant for it in the text, was thought a happy touch.

On the whole the recitations went off with excellent effect. Several of Dr. Marsh's friends among the audience, who may be said to have been old *habitués* of Ashcombe House on the speech-days, were pleased to say that this was the most successful they could remember.

There was no case of actual breakdown in the performance at any rate, and no very serious hitches,

though one or two laughable breaches in pronunciation caused some merriment and temporary confusion. Perhaps the most ludicrous of these was that committed by Jack Dent as Cassius, in the opening speech of the famous quarrel scene,—

“ That you have wronged me doth appear in this :  
You have condemned and noted Lucius Pella  
For taking bribes here of the Sardians.”

So runs the text. Jack began with great vigour, but when he reached the third line, repeated it thus:

“ For taking bribes here of the *Sardines*.”

As ill-luck would have it, he laid especial emphasis on the faulty word, so that it was scarcely possible that it could have escaped the notice of his audience. Tickled by the ludicrous image suggested by Jack's little slip, the spectators were quite unable to control their laughter, which of course caused a short interruption in the proceedings.

For a moment or two Jack was somewhat disconcerted, the more so as he was quite at a loss to know

what he had done to cause all the merriment. It looked rather as if he were going to break down all together, but Dr. Marsh, prompting him from behind the screen with the next line, and bidding him go on in an encouraging whisper, Jack recovered his balance, proceeded in his recitation, and finished with good effect; the audience bestowing an extra measure of applause, partly because they felt that they had done something to discompose the orator, and were pleased with the spirit with which he had after all carried off the speech.

The recitations concluded, the distribution of the prizes followed. They were presented by no less a personage than the Dean of Porthaven, an old college chum of Dr. Marsh's; a gentleman of not merely local reputation, but widely known, as most people are aware, as the author of several valuable and popular works, notably "The Church in the Sixteenth Century."

Harry Wright maintained his place as *dux* in classics, and was therefore captain of the school.



Dennis Kavanagh got the first prize in the school for mathematics, and the second in history ; Willy Hood the first in history, and Arnold Maurice the second in classics; while Sam Demerrick took the prize in the fourth form for essay-writing, a branch of his studies to which he really applied himself with vigour and zest.

The distribution of the prizes over, the dean stood up and delivered a short speech. He was a tall gentleman,—deans frequently are, you may have noticed,—middle-aged, with a pleasant English face, long and rather grave, but lighting up greatly when he spoke and smiled.

He did not say much that was either very new or very clever—that was not required ; but what he said was pleasant in tone, and suited to the place and occasion. He still remembered his own school-days, had a hearty sympathy with youth, and had not forgotten what boys were like, and how much was to be expected from them.

After, of course, congratulating his young hearers,

to whom his words were especially addressed, upon the good report which his friend Dr. Marsh had been able to give, and which he felt sure was an exact and truthful report, in regard to their studies and general conduct during the past term, he proceeded thus:—

“I am sure, my dear boys, that you won't think it out of place in me here to give you a few words of a serious sort; and I am sure you will listen to me, for I promise not to be long. I don't at all believe in too much lecturing for boys, but you know it is the duty of us clergymen to slip in a word of advice whenever we think it may be useful, and the great thing is to do it at the right time. I think this is not an unfit time.

“During the coming holidays many of you will no doubt be often left a good deal to yourselves, out of sight of masters' or parents' eyes. Well, now, I hope you will act in such cases as nearly as you can as you would in the presence of your teachers or parents; by which I mean that you do nothing when

by yourselves that you would be ashamed or afraid to do in their company. And the reason why you should thus act simply is, of course, that you ought to do what is right, not alone out of regard for what your fathers and mothers would wish—though that is an excellent reason too—but, what is a far more important motive, from regard for what God wishes you to be, in whose presence you always are. Always try to recollect, then, boys, that you are never out of your heavenly Father's sight, never out of his thoughts, each and all of you; and try always to guide your conduct by that knowledge. Think that whenever you do wrong—and your consciences and your hearts will seldom fail to tell you when you go wrong—that it grieves God. It must be so if we believe, as we all here do, in a God at all—a Father who has a separate love for and interest in each one of us his children. Do as little as ever you can that he would look upon with sorrow, asking him every morning for help to hold fast to the right throughout the day. Be

truthful, be kind-hearted and generous one to another, be gentle and manly—gentle-manly boys.

“And now I wish you a happy holiday time, and that you may have fine bright weather throughout it, plenty of sunshine and few rainy days, so that you may enjoy your picnics, and boating, and cricket matches, and other out-door excursions and pastimes to the full. Those of you who have worked fairly well through the term will enjoy your holiday now none the less, I am sure,—I know I always enjoy mine all the more after a good spell of hard work,—while those who have been idly inclined—well, I suspect you will continue to enjoy your holidays pretty well too. Whether you deserve to or not is another matter. (Laughter.)

“A word in conclusion in regard to the prize-winners, and to those who have taken none. Those who have gained prizes have my hearty congratulations, for I am sure they have won them fairly and honourably. But from my own recollections of my school-days, I can imagine that there may be some

among you here now who feel a little disappointed and heavy at heart—boys who have worked diligently, who hoped to obtain prizes, and who may, perhaps, have come within a very little of doing so.

“Well, I know what that is. I very distinctly recollect how once, at school, I came just within three marks of gaining the English history prize in my class. The head boy was only two marks ahead of me out of a large number; and I don’t forget to this day the chill of disappointment that struck to my young heart when the class-list was read out. It passed away, of course, pretty soon, but I can remember the feeling now.

“Well, if any here are in similar case, you have my deepest sympathy, and I have this word of consolation to offer you. Be sure your work will not be lost; while the slight heaviness of heart you may be now experiencing will soon pass away, though you may remember the fact long hence.

“Your fathers and mothers will not have a word

to say expressive of disappointment that you take home no prizes, when they know that you have done your best; at least I hope that no parents of boys at this school, or at any school now-a-days, will be so foolish as that.

“If you have taken no prizes this time, you may do so next; but if you don't, it matters nothing, and don't let it vex you for a moment. We cannot all have first places in the world; by far the most must be contented with second and third and fourth. To fill those second and third and fourth places well—as well as we can—that's the thing; and that will alone be sufficient to bring us contentment and happiness.

“I find I have gone on longer than I at first intended. We clergymen are apt to let our words run away with us sometimes. I hope I haven't tired you; and I conclude by again wishing you a happy holiday time.”

The dean's speech, delivered in his clear, pleasant voice, and friendly, conversational, yet sympathetic

manner, was listened to by the boys really very attentively, and was received with tumultuous applause.

The portion in reference to boys who might have worked hard for prizes, but had yet failed to take any, showed that the dean knew boy nature well. For his remarks went straight home to several young hearts—hearts of lads who were with some difficulty maintaining a brave and cheerful aspect amid the general jubilation going on around them. Such went home cheered by the speaker's kindly and sympathetic words, while it may be that on one or two parents present they were also not entirely lost.

While the visitors were rising from their seats and withdrawing, the boys relieved their general feelings, and testified their sentiments towards various persons and things, in somewhat heterogeneous order and juxtaposition, by a large amount of cheering. Cheers first for Dr. Marsh, and the other masters in rotation; cheers for the Queen, and the

dean, and the school, and Mrs. Plumley the house-keeper.

Then little Jack Trickett jumped upon a form, his splendid pink necktie blazing in the afternoon sun like a flag, and—it is generally one of the smallest boys in the school who does this—called for three cheers for the ladies, received with a storm of hurrahing.

Cheers were also given for Harry Wright, it being the custom at Ashcombe House always to signalize the captain of the school in this way; and he was usually the only boy who received this individual mark of honour.

But to-day, directly the cheers for Harry had died away, Harry himself stood up, and called, "Three cheers for Dennis Kavanagh!" And though the challenge was to the large majority of the boys altogether unexpected—Harry having mentioned his intention only to Willy Hood and one or two others—it was responded to with unanimous goodwill. It came well from Harry that he should have



been the proposer ; and Dennis stood in the midst of his applauding schoolmates, flushed and surprised, but feeling at the same time a thrill of pleasure and pride at what Harry had done.

The last cheers proposed were suggested by Dick Barclay, who gave, "Ourselves," amid mingled applause and laughter.

Dennis and Willy left the school together, and Willy accompanied Dennis home. A day or two before he had been asked by his classmate to take tea with him on the breaking-up day, and had very readily agreed. Dennis had, of course, informed those at home by letter of his invitation to Willy, and of the latter's acceptance.

It was close upon the tea-hour when the two boys reached the Kavanaghs' house. Willy quickly found himself at home with Mrs. Kavanagh and Annie ; for, though they now met for the first time, as the reader is aware, each had heard a good deal of the other, sufficient to preclude the feeling of their being strangers. You may be sure that Mrs.

Kavanagh had something extra and special on the table for the occasion, and the meal was a pleasant and merry one.

Both the boys were, of course, in fine spirits; their prizes alone were sufficient to have made them so, and the incidents of the afternoon generally had been of an animating kind. They monopolized the talk almost entirely, and Mrs. Kavanagh and Annie hardly got a word in corner-wise, and were content not to try.

But when the tea was over, the prizes sufficiently examined, admired, and commented upon — Dr. Marsh usually gave handsome books — the boys' tongues slackened a little, and a share of the conversation fell to the ladies.

"Who do you think called here the other afternoon, Dennis?" said Mrs. Kavanagh presently.

"I'm sure I don't know, mamma. Who? Miss Pendrill?"

"No; that wouldn't have been very remarkable. This is a little; more so at least by a good deal.

But it's some one you've been as long acquainted with too."

"Who was it? Male or female?"

"The former. It was Dr. Marsh."

"Was it? Did he come to give you some account of my progress at school and general conduct, or what?"

"That wasn't his chief object, though he referred to that by the way; and his report, I am glad to say, was satisfactory on the whole."

"I'm glad of that, any way. But I'm sure you didn't doubt it would be, did you, *mater mea*?" said Dennis lightly, and with a laugh. "Albeit, go along, mamma."

And then Mrs. Kavanagh related the interview between Dr. Marsh and herself, giving the doctor's own words as nearly as she could remember them.

"And now, Dennis, what do you think of the whole matter? What is your reply to be?" she asked, when she had finished.

Dennis did not immediately answer. "What do you think yourself, mamma?" he said.

"Well, you know, my boy, you must be the chief person to decide."

"Yes, perhaps. But what do you really think yourself about it? I would like you to say."

"Have you been thinking of any kind of business in particular that you would like to apply yourself to after you leave school?"

"Not yet; at least I hadn't thought much upon the subject, and am fixed to nothing."

"Well, do you think you would like this kind of work?"

"I fancy I should, pretty well."

"Then I may say for myself that I am inclined to think well of Dr. Marsh's proposal, Dennis."

"That's good, mamma; for I believe I am too. —What would you say, Willy?"

"It's not easy, Dennis, advising another in a case like this," Willy answered. "But I agree with your mother; I would advise you to try it. If

you don't find that school-teaching suits you, at the end of a year or so, say, why, you can easily give it up, and take to something else, and no harm done, for you will be still young. But I think you will come to like the kind of work well enough. And I can tell you this too. To a fellow who has once decided on being a schoolmaster, a situation at Ashcombe House isn't at all a bad beginning. I know that several of the doctor's assistants have left him for very good situations in larger schools; and one master, shortly after I went to Ashcombe House, opened a school of his own. I'm sure the doctor would be very ready to help forward any one who had served him well, and in whom he took an interest. You may, of course, hope to do as well as others before you, and may at last have as good a school as Ashcombe House."

"If I do so, that will quite satisfy my ambition, or even something rather less," said Dennis, laughing.

"Then the salary isn't bad to begin with, con-

sidering your age and everything," continued Willy.

"I'm quite content with that part. It's as much as I'll be worth for the first year, I know, though I think I'll do my best."

"I'm sure of that, and I'm pretty certain you'll get on first-rate, Dennis, with the youngsters. You know enough for them already, and you've six months to prepare yet. I wish I was staying at the school a little longer, just to see you at your post, old chap; but I leave at the end of the year, you know."

"Yes; I *am* sorry for that, Willy, I needn't tell you. But we'll see each other sometimes, I hope."

"Oh yes; we'll manage that."

"Well, then, Dennis, I suppose you have decided to answer Dr. Marsh in the affirmative?" asked Mrs. Kavanagh.

"Yes, mamma. I won't write; I'll walk over to the school and see Dr. Marsh myself some day next week. That will be best, I think."

"I'm so glad, Denny," said Annie, with brightened

eyes. "I feel sure you will like your new work, and get on well with it too."

A little while later, and Willy rose and took his leave. He did not wish his visit to the Kavanaghs to be a long one on this occasion. But he parted from them with a warm invitation to repeat it soon, which he very readily promised to do, after Dennis had first been to see him.

Willy had given no hint as to how much Dr. Marsh's visit to Mrs. Kavanagh, and his proposal to Dennis, had been due to himself. He did not himself know exactly to what extent Dr. Marsh's action had been influenced by his words; but he could guess that it must have been in some degree

When he told Dennis's story in connection with Miss Pendrill to Dr. Marsh, it had not, of course, been with any view to his acting as he had done. Willy had merely thought that Dr. Marsh should know it, and would like to know it; and in this he was right. He had narrated the circumstances

simply and exactly, but with some friendly warmth and enthusiasm as he proceeded.

Dr. Marsh had made no comment on the matter at the time, but it had made an impression upon him, as the shape and promptness of his action sufficiently showed.

To the course taken by Willy, then—to its having suggested itself to him to tell his friend's story to Dr. Marsh, and to the effective though direct and simple way in which he had done this, which had at once secured the master's sympathy—we may fairly say that the good fortune which had befallen Dennis was in a considerable measure due.

Willy walked back to his own home genuinely glad in his heart that he had been able, as he felt he had, to do something that might be the beginning of good things to come for his friend.

"He's a good fellow," he said to himself. "He deserves more than this, and his people too."











